Sulfur 17

Featuring:

JACKSON MAC LOW • OCTAVIO PAZ • ALLEN GINSBERG
HARRY "THE HIPSTER" GIBSON • LEON GOLUB • PAUL LAFFOLEY
ROBERT GLUCK • ELIOT WEINBERGER • NORMA COLE

I, ROBUR MASTER OF THE WORLD
YOU MUST ONLY ME FOR ONLY I CAN SAVE THE WORLD
OUTER CORE
INNER CORE OF MOTHER EARTH
THE SYSTEMS WILL LEAD THE WORLD TO ATAVISM
THE ALBATROSS
ISLAND X
THE UNITED TRANSFORMATION OF PEOPLE IN ACTION NOW OOOM...
I ROBUR MASTER OF THE WORLD PRESENT THE ARCHITECTURE OF TRANSFORMATION AS THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF A WORLD FACED WITH CONTINUOUS CHANGE AND THE GROWING POSSIBILITY OF ULTIMATE DOOM. I HAVE UTILIZED THE FANTASIES OF THE VISIONARY BORED, INFANTILE, INSANE, FANATICAL, AGGRESSIVELY IGNORANT, HYPER-CRITICAL, DISENCHANTED ONES
THE MOON-LINK
BY A RECIPROCAL TRANSFER OF POWER FROM THE MOON TO THE EARTH BY THE MOVEMENT OF THE SHELLS AND THE MAINTENANCE OF THE MOON'S ORBITAL VELOCITY BY ELECTRONICS THE WORK OF MANKIND AS PURE SURVIVAL IS ELIMINATED
LIVING STRUCTURES
IN OUR AGE OF DESPERATE SENTIMENTALITY WHAT COULD BE SO NATURAL AS THE USE OF GENETICALLY PROGRAMED CREATURES, THUS MAKING OUR DESIGNED ENVIRONMENT A TRUE LEARNING EXPERIENCE WITH ITS RISKY EMOTIONAL GIVE AND TAKE
THE URBAN FOSSICKATED OCTAVE
A FLYING CITY CONTRASTING THE WORLDSCAPE WHICH CONTAINS PHYSICALLY AND CONCEPTUALLY ALTERABLE ENVIRONMENTS ON A DAILY, MONTHLY AND YEARLY CYCLE BECOMES THE NEW ACROPOLIS, THE COMPLETE INTEGRATION OF ALL KNOWLEDGE
SPACE ISLANDS
THE KEEPER OF THE CUSP IS AN ISLAND BOTH PHYSICALLY AND CONCEPTUALLY. IT IS HERE THE DYNAMICS CHARACTER OF THIS UTOPIA IS MAINTAINED BY ALLOWING TOTALLY ALIEN MICRO-WORLDS TO DEVELOP PROVIDING NEW INFORMATION AND CULTURES.
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A NEW ADDRESS FOR SULFUR: with the current issue (Vol. VI, #2) Sulfur has new offices c/o English Department, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197. Subscriptions are $15 a year (3 issues) for individuals; $22 for institutions; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add $3 for surface mail postage, $12 for air mail postage. Make all checks payable to Sulfur in U.S. currency. Single copy: $6. Back issues (except #1) still available at $6 each. No manuscripts will be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

Design and typography by Barbara Martin

Typeset by Sasha Newborn

A LITERARY TRI-QUARTERLY OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: PAUL LAFFOLEY
I, ROBUR MASTER OF THE WORLD
Oil and acrylic on canvas; 73½'' square
Color transparency courtesy of Stux Gallery,
Boston / New York City

1986 issues of SULFUR are made possible in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts

JACKSON MAC LOW

PIECES O' SIX—XXIV

Riot in the lute song's propinquity. Propose to be guided by the less obvious illumination. Let it be axiomatic. Do not be traumatized by the practical. Wrench a regard from the passenger during a cassation. Court the benediction's witness. Lend an activity to the calflike penitent. Be frantic. Rankle or be fantastic under a plane tree. Penetrate a gaze less canine than candid. Fortify an egregious portion. Quench a criminal pundit. Fetch an alert grief from the border. Bowdlerize summitry ana. Fashion a clannish arbitrage of clinches. Equal a recycled creek. Rest from your laurels. Keen within horizons. Neaten a clearing. Divide the pelf from the anachronistic liabilities. Run from a libel. Ice the carded portraits of the antic pontiffs. Lessen the penetrating laughter of the included passersby. Fan out. Trust a cautiously broadened tantrum. Renege on the banter promised amid a siege of icicles before the porch was cornered. Dirty a cloth. Nationalize enacted obsequies long before they're uncalled for. Devise a Lateran increase. Insist upon the formation of a calculated goal lest everything else be reduced. Produce a lack of accord between a sanitary answer and ambitious sustenance. Dissuade the hisses of others from brightening applegreen entities. Resist an effortless classification. Answer appetite with an unconscionable melody. Thrust an action between the potential and the actual. Harness the intent arising from depressed narcissism or reasonable panic. Pleasure-feature the cast. Fancy a paramilitary attraction less lasting than wit. Reckon up the saddest and most pellucid reekings of the crafty stormers of the moment. Demonize the sleekest barren fortune. Reactivate the last inviolable tent pegs of the mighty and the timid well before the storm pales. Never let "incredible" be your password. Treat a gleam as less hasty than its vanishment. Recognize the lack of a parlor. Take your unuttered grievances far from the best utility. Acclimate one or more hesitant giants before the curfew rages. Activate anthracite. Weaken aspiration toward "whether" and "rather" or elicit "perhaps." Decorate the enharmonic enterprise. Let the will be. Notate obligatory reactivations. Pair the least episodes and antiquate stresses to let the Nile be. Absorb the fortunate borders of the genetic code. Nativize marginal cliques. Let the grand jury marvel and the crowd collect its molars under the sunset. Levitate the censors and make them answerable. Fortify the absent mandala. Engorge it with esemplastic electricity. Panel the ingredients, caused and causeless. Finitize every surrogate objectivization or kerneled hut, having emphasized daemonic salutations and solutions when that area had

undergone its technically inevitable recurrence before the flashes fared on and the oxyacetylene selves wearied in wonted fury or phantasmic forgetfulness, unintentionally florid, abasing its radars for popular favor, eccentric ammunition, rear-door inspiration. Add to the thicket. Risk the felt encrusted passing and the arduous percent. Make it ethnic. Bombard the larger ectoplasmic bits and pieced edges. Enact the oneirection of the disturbed gift beneath the lengths of axioms every kenner closes out from in the overburdened mornings they ended up not-guilty in, ripely applauding, finically cast off. Impress the hyaline empress. Close the net. Fetch glassed Eratomanes from legal ensconced precincts before alleged water motivates its own metamorphosis to handy attested wine, factively operative, gripping. Inspect and attack an intentional map. Please ask leave to signify. Rent intact an orthodox exclusion. Set free factitious lemma'd-encyclical-inky limitations. Rank in a rank. Befit the sum of ordinary gallantries, quizzical trees, asteroids, trapdoors. Let effort speak in immediate foreboding and counsel. Swagger. Expect a trim instance, an effable occurrence, a statutory fastening and flanking. Submit a quiet candle. Anchor a swerved aspect, an animal trace. Pity the excess flute player. Meditate on the immediate muddle, the ultimate befuddlement and hanky. Crack the undefended clock-beastly code as you construct the new society in the waxy shell of the old. Release the familiarly benefited terminus, bonded, inexcusable, deciphered, secretly tender, immobile. Focus on the more or less absolute resultant or figurative rash. Sanction wing'd hollows. Act out self-aggrandizement, perennially willy-nilly, sadistically sweet, orphaned. Personate an eradicable maze. Fabulate a picturable sweater. Rasp before you rack. Ensure that the dog she saw was other than its accidental other. Crowd forth beyond eagerness, exemplarily sandaled, strangled, clumsy. Defer to a dun. Extract a methodical district. Enforce the sun. Exhibit insipid data. Ask about tranquillity. Commemorate regions and stages, phases and affable clasping frankness, flapping and emptied, matched by any misery. Irritate, exaggerate, and prey. Recover two hundred and sixty-seven sets of remains. Nail the effrontery of the exigent palace deluged by incriminating barbarities and analogies cored or penetrating. Absolve thieves. Needle an idle icebreaker. Factify. Try a triumph rather than an all-embracing ulcer. Wed feathers and lead. Sketch the encompassing without effecting reflection or unintended effort. Ready the telltale signatures and sprigs. Rip the hints from kinship. Detail the lacks and passages and incunabula where oafish industry's betrayed by cryptoprayerful gestures and seeds are on the fire ranked with climatorial proof. Rattle axes. Battle access and additional nobility of appetite. Cycle a try or two and leave the tribe. Liven the executive excuse. Seem to gleam. Economize where the front's insatiate or sapience beckons. Register the cable that fortified the binding. Lie about the truth. Smooth the active comfort of crestfallen halves. Have a nice day. Slash the frac-

tions brute appearance constitutes. Seismogrify a settlement of coal tips. Alert a trench and specialize in essence. Bury a popular proximity and somnolently close a sort of suture. Speak. Initiate a needed corrugation. Reel in reflected answers wherever the learned terror clings. Inspissate a cannular regard. Track a torrent's corridor sufficiently. Discuss or sap a drama. Light into the excellent perpetrators encouragingly when an irritant might increase proliferation. Be persuaded. Settle dyslexic executants. Loll in a carnival where wheat exceeds prescribed experienced leaves. Annotate whatever entered crucibles exact a hated recompense or trance. Banish the diseased chrysanthemum. Tear apart leggings finished long before. Open the fair. Let the cat leap. Peel a kiwi. Scoop a pumpkin. Better thy bitterness. Liken every solid to an equivalent. View the findings with an unbemused rapture before the picture changes or enchants. Listen. Ride out the called-for storm or stem the tide. Weave a foliation. Elide a gamble. Sweep the drachma-driven creature over. Announce the tree before its singularities are riven. Constitute a crisis. Cheat. Seek every appropriate means within the lead time and the span of the faction's action. Write. Fend for yourself. Don't always be surprised. Back out of the instigation if you let the hatchways scream. Modify your model inclinations. Solidify. Be bold.

15 August-11 September 1985
New York

OCTAVIO PAZ

A FABLE OF JOAN MIRO

(Tr. from the Spanish by Eliot Weinberger)

Blue was immobilized between red and black.
The wind came and went over the page of the plains,
lighting small fires, wallowing in the ashes,
went off with its face sooty, shouting on the corners,
the wind came and went, opening, closing windows and doors,
came and went through the twilit corridors of the skull,
the wind in a scrawl, with ink-stained hands
wrote and erased what it had written on the wall of the day.
The sun was no more than an omen of the color yellow,
a hint of feathers, a cock's future crow.
The snow had gone astray, the sea had lost its speech
and was a wandering murmur, a few vowels in search of a word.

Blue was immobilized, no one saw it, no one heard:
red was a blind man, black a deaf mute.
The wind came and went, asking, Where are you going Joan Miró?
He had been here from the beginning, but the wind hadn't seen him:
immobilized between blue and red, black and yellow,
Miró was a transparent mirage, a mirage with seven hands.
Seven hands in the form of ears, to hear the seven colors,
seven hands in the form of feet, to climb the seven steps of the rainbow,
seven hands in the form of roots, to be everywhere and in Barcelona at the same time.

Miró was a mirage with seven hands.
With the first hand, he beat the drum of the moon,
with the second, he scattered birds in the garden of the wind,
with the third, he rattled the dice-cup of the stars,
with the fourth, he wrote The Legend of the Centuries of Snails,
with the fifth, he planted islands in the chest of green,
with the sixth, he created a woman by mixing night and water, music and electricity,
with the seventh, he erased everything he had made and started over again.

Red opened its eyes, black mumbled something incoherent, and blue got up.
None of them could believe what it saw:
were those eight hawks or eight umbrellas?
The eight spread their wings and flew off, disappearing through a broken windowpane.

Miró set fire to his canvases.
Lions and spiders burned, women and stars,
the sky filled with triangles, spheres, discs, hexahedrons in flames,
the blaze consumed the planetary farmer planted in the middle of space,
butterflies, flying fish, wheezing phonographs sprouted from the ash-heap,
but between the holes in the charred paintings
blue space came back, and the swallow's flash, the foliage of the clouds, and the flowering rod:
it was spring insisting, insisting with its green airs.
In the face of such luminous stubbornness, Miró scratched his head with his fifth hand,
muttering to himself, *I work like a gardener.*
A garden of stones or of boats? Pulleys or ballerinas?
Blue, black and red ran through the meadows,
the stars were walking naked, but the shivering hills snuggled under the sheets,
there were portable volcanoes and artificial fires at home.
The two ladies who guard the entrance to the doors of perception, Geometry and Perspective,
had taken Miró's arm and gone for a bit of air, singing *Une étoile caresse le sein d'une negresse.*

The wind turned around on the page of the plains, lifted its head and said, But where are you going Joan Miró?
He had been here from the beginning and the wind hadn't seen him:
Miró was a transparent mirage where hectic alphabets came and went.
These were not letters coming and going through the tunnels of his eyes:
they were living things that joined and split apart, embraced, gnawed on each other and scattered,
running over the page in frantic, multicolored rows, they had tails and horns,
some were covered with scales, others with feathers, others were stark naked,

and the words they formed were palpable, audible, edible, but unpronounceable,
these were not letters but sensations, these were not sensations but transfigurations.

And for what? To scratch a line in the hermit's cell,
to light the moon-head of a peasant with a sunflower,
to welcome the night that comes with its blue characters and festival birds,
to hail death with a round of geraniums,
to say *good morning* to morning when it comes without ever asking where it comes from or where it goes,
to remember that a waterfall is a girl coming down the stairs dying of laughter,
to see the sun and its planets swinging on the trapeze of the horizon,
to learn to see so that things will see us and come and go through our seeing,
living alphabets that send out roots, shoot up, bud, flower, fly off, scatter, fall.

Sight is seed, to see is to sow, Miró works like a gardener
and with his seven hands endlessly sketches—circle and tail, oh! and ah!—
that great exclamation with which the world begins each day.

Mexico City, 9 March 1980

ARLENA GIBSON-FELLER

from THE HIPSTER: THE STORY OF HARRY "THE HIPSTER" GIBSON

Walking down Lenox Avenue, Harlem—looking for Marlowe.

Not Marlowe—I don't even know there is a Marlowe. Looking for a piano player—a good one—so I can watch his hands.

It's autumn—cold—city cold, blowing between the buildings—brick cold, cement cold, iron railing cold.

Two in the morning. Three. Hit all the gin joints on one side of Lenox. Twenty-five cents, a big gin, with a water chaser.

This place is just like the rest of them, couple of dozen tables, old upright piano.

There's Marlowe! Marlowe! he hangs over the piano! eyes closed! listening to himself! that stride style! spider hands! grabs ten notes! like nothing! hits them solid! fast! a brown blur! nothing slow about Marlowe! Ends the chorus, *bam*! he's in another key! Ends the chorus, changes again! "Honeysuckle Rose" in E! Nobody plays it in E! Nobody! And now! doubles up the tempo! freight train speed! roaring! not breathing hard! not Marlowe! He's done! Made it look easy!

"Hey, man, what're ya drinkin'?" I say.

"Gin!" he says. That's all they sell.

Two gins on the piano.

"Mind if I watch you?"

"Naw, man, I don' mind. What you want to hear?"

"How about 'It Had To Be You'?"

I get my number twelve times, in every key!

"You always do that?" I say.

"Yeah, man!"

Every night after two, I sit by Marlowe's piano, with a couple of gins. Tonight it's just me, Marlowe, the bartender, and that cold that comes in underneath the door.

"Hey, man, what do you do?" says Marlowe. "Are you a piano player or some kind of musician?"

"Yeah, I play a little piano."

"I thought so! I figured that was it! What do you play?"

"A little Fats Waller stuff."

"You don' play no Fats Waller! No, come on, you don' play no Fats Waller!"

"Naw, I don't play Fats Waller. I play a little of his stuff."

"Fats Waller? Listen, sit down and play me some Fats Waller."

The joint's empty. Just me, Marlowe, the barkeep, and that cold creeping in. My fingers are stiff. I do "Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter," like Fats' record.

Marlowe sips gin. "Say, you do play a little like Fats Waller. A little! You play a couple of numbers—I got to go out and talk to this chick. Keep on playin', I'll be back."

Marlowe's some kind of hustler. I don't know what he does out there, but it brings in some coins.

I start filling in for him all the time. He comes back and slaps a five or a ten in my hand. "I don't want to hear nothing' " he says, "just take it . . ."

One night Marlowe makes his usual run . . . leaves me at the piano . . . It's six in the morning, and no Marlowe. The bartender's cleaning the glasses. "Take the bread" he says. "You earned it. You played all night. It's yours. Marlowe got hung up."

I grab the kitty. I feel bad.

"And listen, by the way" the barkeep says, "maybe you better come back tomorrow."

The next night, I sit down and play. No Marlowe. Ah, Marlowe's got to come. In the back of the place some pimp beats a woman. The bouncers take care of it: "Carry your disagreements out to the sidewalk!" Four in the morning. No Marlowe. The last drunk slithers out the door. Lenox Avenue turns grey. No Marlowe. I take the kitty and go home. What happened to Marlowe? He was no conversationalist—never talked much, and I never asked. I don't know what he does out there, but, whatever it is, Marlowe got hung up . . .

It's been weeks . . . I'm still waiting . . . for Marlowe . . . it's his job, if he wants it . . . just holding it down for him . . .

I come in, put a beer glass on the piano, and stick a dollar in it—you start out and your kitty's already green—gives the customers the idea . . .

Here comes a dozen people, throwing off furs . . . they're walking chandeliers . . . lights from their diamonds, in their teeth, everywhere. Big guy walks up to me . . . "Where's Marlowe"

"Uh, Marlowe got hung up!" Do I look like missing persons?

The big customer leans low. "Now, boy, I come to see Marlowe! I sure love that man . . ." He looks at his crowd . . . "Brought a lot of people here that wanta be entertained, hear Marlowe play 'Honeysuckle Rose' . . . in twelve keys . . . Can you play 'Honeysuckle Rose'?"

The nasty son of a bitch. I'd like to work him over. I smile, start in on the tune . . . "Every honeybee / fills with jealousy . . ."

"You do it like Fats, huh?" the big guy says. "Well, that's 'bout as good as Marlowe . . . Play on, little feller, play along, we're listening!"

"Man, you sure sound like Fats Waller! Don't he sound just like Fats?" They nod and grin.

He's really tickled! He chuckles! laughs! burbles! They all do! What's so funny? Ah, they're full of coke! boo! hooch! Happy! In their own world! The fat man puts five in the kitty. Five! in this joint!

"You must know Fats Waller! Must listen to him! all the time!"

"Oh, yeah, me and Fats are tight."

"He must show you a lot."

"Sure, he's my teacher. He takes me around after hours."

"That's great. Lessons from Fats Waller. Listen, boy, maybe you could show *me* something."

He slides me off the stool. I'm ready to plant my hand in that soft puss—turn his ass midnight!

"Hey, that's my piano . . ."

"Keep yourself calm, my man, don't do anything to spoil the indigestion! Let me derange myself on this stool." He wraps his big hands around the keys. The first chord, I know who he is.

He gets done with "Ain't Misbehavin'," grins, and puts his big hand out.

"Meet your old professor, Thomas Waller" he says. "See, that's a lesson for you. In life, one never knows. Do one? . . . Well, don't embarrass yourself. For somebody your size and color, you really do play some Fats Waller."

A couple of weeks later . . . "Hey, boy, you still waiting for Marlowe?" It's Fats again. "That's no use! Don't you know? Marlowe's never gonna show! That cat gets himself hung up . . . good! You gonna sit here the rest of your life? or do you want a *good* job?"

The Yacht Club! Poshest place on Fifty-Second Street! That's the job Fats got me, playing intermission for him. Pays union scale, fifty-six dollars! A week! Done up in nautical decor, this joint—beams, lanterns, everything . . . in the worst taste they could manage.

Fats does the floor show. They love him. He's their big black child with a derby and cigar. "Thank you, folks. Enjoy yourself. Order another round. Don't you go home. Here comes my favrit piano player. Give my favrit piano player a big hand. Mr. Harold Raab! . . ."

I wheel out the intermission seventy-seventy. "Bring that piano over here, boy." Fats is at his table. "I want to hear you! Give old Fats something slow and easy! I like the sweet things in life!" He's downing drinks, one after another. The customers buy him enough to kill him, a dozen shots, lined up like soldiers. Tombstones.

I play "Ain't Misbehavin'." Fats applauds, they all applaud. "See, I taught this boy everything he knows. I'm his old professor. I always be-

lieved you could teach a white boy jazz if only you tried hard enough. Just to prove it, I took the skinniest, lightest-complexioned boy I could find. Picked him up in the Bronx—nothing but a tadpole. Whopped him when he wouldn't mind. It was work . . . I'm tellin' you . . . Now here he is . . . playing just exactly like I showed him . . ."

Down an alley . . . between two houses . . . through a house . . . a cellar . . . dark as a coal bin . . . Fats knows where he's going . . . there's a door . . .

We go in. It's brighter . . . not much . . . a little dive, with a piano . . . funk upright . . . "It's *Fats* . . . It's Fats . . ." They're whispering . . . They know him here.

He introduces me. "This is my protege, Mr. Raab. This is . . . and this is . . ." I'm meeting the greatest piano players in New York! the world! the goddam universe! I'm cockeyed! Knocked for a loop!

The place is Grant's, where they have piano battles, after hours. You show your union card and your fast fingers just to get in—not everybody off the streets—piano players and their friends.

One old piano! The best listening to the best! You can't run, and you sure can't hide!

Fats plays . . . the finest I've heard him . . . not what he does at the Club . . . no! He does three things at once . . . and everything a surprise . . . as sweet as he can be . . . melts you . . . like butter . . .

He rises . . . solemn! Raises his hand! "No more applause, please! And now . . ."

And now! God! He's going to introduce me! I know it! His idea of a joke! "The genius!" It'd be just like him! "The world's greatest piano player that ever lived!" I'm sick! My knees knock the table! "Ladies and Gentlemen . . . I give you . . . Mr. Art Tatum . . ." Tatum! Of course! What was I thinking?

Tatum plays. What can you say?— watching thunder, listening to lightning. He plays and plays and plays, and doesn't stop . . . till he comes . . . to the very end.

Nobody gets near the piano now. Glasses tinkle. Lots of muttering. "Mutter!" "Mutter! Mutter!" Art Tatum just said it all! Might as well everybody else shut their traps.

Fats nudges me. "Go up and give 'em a little something, boy."

Is he kidding?

"Go ahead. Play that style you play. Don't be so shy and backwards."

"Not after Art Tatum!"

"That's how you do? After I take you off the streets and be a mother and father to you? Get your white ass up there before I sit on you!"

I go to the piano. White? Yes! And getting whiter all the time!

All these piano players—these mugs you see in every *Downbeat*—

they're immortal, alive since the year one!

My hands shake . . . can't play unless I cut them down to size. Picture them on the crapper . . . it's the only way, an old show biz trick, for facing the audience. There they are, with their pants down . . . every last one, grunting . . . the whole room, full of toilets . . . and the sounds . . . plllbbbhhh . . . they're not so hot any more.

Now! I can play!

*

Five years on the street that never sleeps, and I never sleep. I'm beginning to smell bad to myself. Five years, Ruthie is still carrying my music, one club to another. We play the cocktail hour, the shows, the afterhours joints, round the clock—never go home. And it's union scale, just fifty-six dollars a week. Some life! And the future . . . I see Maxie Kaminsky, the Dixieland trumpet player—he's taking the subway. Ten years older than me! a great musician! riding the subway! We still live on Ruth's money, still send mine home to Florence and the kids . . . but there's four of them now . . .

Billie's moving around in the next dressing room, at the Deuces. I'm changing my shirt—you sweat buckets, doing a show . . .

"Hey, Hipster, it's about time for my medicine"—she's calling from next door—"Come on over and help me, would you?"

Lady talks the way she sings. Molasses with something bitter in it. Slow, no hurry, then everything together—then nothing. Breaking over a word, like a hurt animal . . . I can't listen to her sometimes—that pure sorrow.

"Yeah, baby" I say, "I'll be right over. Just changing my shirt . . ."

She's real sad today, sad and slow, because she hasn't had her medicine. She's just in her underwear—reaches into her pants—grabs the cellophane bag of powder. The room smells like her—bitter—even with all the rotten gardenias. White women smell sour—black women, bitter. She's nodding. Can't keep her head up. Too much effort to live . . .

"Got to change my stash . . . Dreamed last night, they busted me, man . . . I know they were following me today . . . one car . . . saw it through the window every *time* I looked back . . . every *time* . . . Mama said she heard clicks on the phone—I know they're bugging the line . . ."

She's cooking a spoon . . . keeps striking matches . . . puts it in the syringe . . .

"Aw, Billie, why the hell would they do all that? If they're gonna bust ya, they'll just bust ya."

"No, you don't understand. They playing cat and mouse. *Playing* with me. You drive home with *me* some night! up to Harlem. I see them kick the shit out of them old wino niggers, the old whores, anybody they can

get their damn *hands* on. Kick 'em in the stomach. Wail on them, man, *wail* . . ."

She's winding a kerchief around her arm. Red silk.

"Hold that turnikey now. Hold it tight."

She's in slow motion . . . underwater . . . waiting for the veins to pop . . . The track's all the way down her arm. Elbow to wrist. She's searching in the middle. Gets the mark—pulls some blood up the needle . . . dark brown. She's on the vein. Presses down, hard. "Oh, yeah" she says, "oh, yeah!"

It's an explosion. She's buzzing. Her cheeks flush. You can see the pink. Her eyes shine—teary, strange—dancing! "Oh, yeah! That's what I'm talkin' about!"

"Come on, talk to me, I need company. You want a taste? You're just a little boy, you can't have too much. But I'll give you a tippy." She puts it on a nail file and holds it under my nose. A little of Billie's stuff got you really high. "Okay, one for you, two for me. You don't want to get no habit! Don't laugh, I mean it. I see you hanging around with all those bad junkies. You watch yourself!

"Man, I never would have started if it wasn't for those dirty pimps. They give you a shitpail full of it—get you working! pump your ass! I was just a kid . . .

"Man, I don't eat right any more. I used to be fat and smooth. Look at me. Won't eat my own mama's cookin' . . .

"You know that Lester—that man! hasn't balled for months! . . . lies there dreaming . . . talking to his damned self . . . all morning long . . . Too much shit!

"And those bad dreams, those nightmares! Last night I dreamed I was busted . . . I could feel that cold cement floor under me . . ."

The band's playing downstairs—Ben Webster. As long as they take choruses, nobody's coming up to bother us. Billie sits on my lap, wraps herself around me like a cloud . . .

Somebody bangs on the door. "Go away! Who the fuck is that?" Billie says. "Who'd they let up here? We don't want to talk to nobody right now!"

"Lemme in! It's me! It's Dizzy, baby!"

"Listen, I don't want no Dizzy! I got to go on in a while. You too jumpy! You make me nervous . . ."

He's banging louder—using his feet. Gets his shoulder into it. He's a big guy, with a bull neck—when he plays horn, he blows up like a cobra—head! neck! shoulders!

"Dizzy! You stop that! Just go to hell with yourself! I told you I don't want no Dizzy! You damn crazy fool! Coming around, making people mad!"

He's through the door . . . seeing red . . . eyeballs popping . . . two hundred pounds, and off his skull! Why didn't we let him in, that's what

he'd like to know. He wants to talk . . . things on his mind . . . He's not just anybody! He's Dizzy! can't he talk to Billie once in a while? And if she's so nervous, what's the ofay piano player doing here?

Billie picks up a pair of scissors. She's high! a powerhouse! after his ass! quick! Dizzy flies around the room, running into walls, tripping, banging his shins, his head. "What the fuck's wrong with you, woman?" He gesticulates. "Put that thing down. It's *Dizzy*!"

"You fuckin' botherin' me! Give me a minute of peace! If it ain't the square johns, it's the damn musicians! 'John Hammond's down there.' Fuck John Hammond! Don't want to see no John *Hammond*, no *Dizzy*, no *nobody* . . ."

Dizzy's got the message! He's in a corner, all over himself, trying to get out. The mirror's spilled on the floor—sparkling . . . Dizzy's breathing hard. "I just want to get out now, Baby! Lemme out the door! All right? . . . Never seen nobody get so mad! . . . Damn! . . ."

He's gone. Billie pushes the door into the jamb. It's completely haywire. A mess. She sits down, breathing hard—swears to herself . . . "That Dizzy was a sight! Thought I was gonna cut him! with the damned scissors!" She laughs a chorus . . . sweat pours on her face . . . She comes close, spills it on me. "Ben's still blowing" she says, "let's be nice to each other."

*

Continuous checker game going on in the dressing room between me and Charlie Parker—We play to see who pays for the food—Bird eats all the time—in between shows (he don't care)—He always loses—no way he can win against me—The best most anybody can get from me is a draw—Bird don't believe this—he thinks it's luck—We're playing this game—it's even—he don't want to quit—the intermission act is off—my show's next—"Let's play and blow the show"—"I'm with you man"—"groovy"—we're both on heavy shit—spaced out—Bird carries the checker board up on stage—nobody knows what's going on—"Your move"—The guys in my group—breaking up—We're cookin' my first number—Bird's studying the board—makes an exchange—picks up his horn—blows a wild chorus—gets a hand—I jump one of his—sing the lyrics "Who put the benzedrine in Mrs Murphy's Ovaltine"—Everybody's diggin' the game—shouting—"Move it man"—cheering—"Get it on Bird"—"Play it cool Hipster"—We're playing the whole show—people laughing—high jiving—"Git it man"—"Don't hit no clinkers"—"Watch out"—"Lay it down"—"That's it"—"Let's call it a draw Bird"—"My man"—We laugh—rock the joint.

THREE POEMS

READING BAI JUYI

I

I'm a traveler in a strange country
China and I've been to many cities
Now I'm back in Shanghai, days
under warm covers in a room with electric heat—
a rare commodity in this country—
hundreds of millions shiver in the north
students rise at dawn and run around the soccerfield
Workmen sing songs in the dark to keep themselves warm
while I sleep late, smoke too much cough,
turn over in bed on my right side
pull the heavy quilt over my nose and go back
to visit the dead my father, mother and immortal
friends in dreams. Supper's served me,
I can go out and banquet, but prefer
this week to stay in my room, recovering
a cough. I don't have to sell persimmons on the streetcurb
in Baoding like the lady with white bandanna'd head
Don't have to push my boat oars around a rocky corner
in the Yangtze gorges, or pole my way downstream
from Yichang through yellow industrial scum, or carry water
buckets on a bamboo pole over my shoulder
to a cabbage field near Wuxi—I'm famous,
my poems have done some men good
and a few women ill, perhaps the good
outweighs the bad, I'll never know.
Still I feel guilty I haven't done more;
True I praised the dharma from nation to nation
But my own practice has been amateur, seedy
—even I dream how bad a student I am—
My teacher's tried to help me, but I seem
to be lazy and have taken advantage of money
and clothes my work's brought me, today
I'll stay in bed again & read old Chinese poets—

I don't believe in an afterworld of god or even
another life separate from this incarnation
Still I worry I'll be punished for my carelessness
after I'm dead—my poems scattered and my name
forgotten and my self reborn a foolish workman
freezing and breaking rocks on a roadside in Hebei.

10 A.M.

II

"Ignorant and contentious" I spent lunch
arguing about boys making love with a student.
Still coughing, reclusive, I went back to bed
with a headache, despite afternoon sun
streaming through the french windows
weakly, to write down these thoughts.
Why've I wanted to appear heroic, why
strain to accomplish what no mortal could—
Heaven on earth, self perfection, household
security, & the accomplishment of changing the World.
A noble ambition, but that of a pathetic dreamer.
Tomorrow if I recover from bronchitis
I'll put on a serious face and go down to the Market.

2:30 P.M.

III

Lying head on pillow aching
still reading poems of Tang roads
Something Bai said made me press my finger
to my eyes and weep—maybe his love
for an old poet friend, for I also

have grey on my cheek and bald head
and the Agricultural poet's in the madhouse this week
a telegram told me, more historical
jackanapes maybe tragic maybe comic
I'll know when I come home around the world.
Still with heavy heart and aching head I read on
till suddenly a cry from the garden reminded me
of a chicken, head chopped off running around spurting blood
from its neck on farm yard dirt, I was eleven years old,
or the raptured scream of a rabbit—I put down my book
and listened carefully to the cry almost drowned
by the metal sound of cars and horns—It was a bird
repeating its ascending whistle, pipe notes burst
into a burble of joyful tones ending wildly
with variable trills in swift succession high and low
and high again. At least it wasn't me, not my song,
a sound outside my mind, nothing to do with my aching brow.

3:30 P.M.

IV

I lay my cheek on the pillow to nap
and my thoughts floated against the stream
up to Zhong Xian west of the Three Gorges
where Bai Juyi was Governor.
"Two streams float together and meet further on
and mingle their water. Two birds fly upward
beneath the ninth month's cold white cloud.
Two trees stand together bare branched
rooted in the same soil secretly touching.
Two apples hung from the same bough last
month and disappeared into the Market."
So flowed my mind like the river, like the wind.
"Two thoughts have risen together in dream therefore
Two worlds will be one if I wake and write."
So I lifted my head from my pillow and Woke
to find I was a sick guest in a vast poor kingdom
A famous visitor honored with a heated room,

medicines, special foods and learned visitors
inquiring when I'd be well enough to lecture my hosts
on the musics and poetics of the wealthy
Nation I had come from half way round the world

8:15 P.M.

V *China Bronchitis*

I sat up in bed and pondered what I'd learned
while I lay sick almost a month:
That monks who could convert Waste to Treasure
were no longer to be found among the millions
in the province of Hebei. That *The Secret of the Golden Lotus*
has been replaced by the Literature of the *Scar*, nor's hardly
anybody heard of the *Meditation Cushion of the Flesh*
That smoking Chinese or American cigarettes makes me cough;
Old men had got white haired and bald before
my beard showed the signs of its fifty-eight snows.
That of Three Gorges on the Yangtze the last one downstream
is a hairpin turn between thousand-foot-high rock mountain gates.
I learned that the Great Leap Forward caused millions
of families to starve, that the Anti-Rightist Campaign
against bourgeois "Stinkers" sent revolutionary poets
to shovel shit in Xinjiang Province a decade before
the Cultural Revolution drove countless millions of readers
to cold huts and starvation in the countryside Northwest.
That sensitive poetry girls in Shanghai dream
of aged stars from Los Angeles movies. That down the alley
from the stone bridge at Suzhou where Jiang Ji spent
a sleepless night wakened by the bell of Cold Mountain Temple,
water lapping against his boat a thousand years ago,
a teahouse stands with two-stringed violin and flutes
and wooden stage. That the gold in the Sun setting
at West Lake Hangzhou is manufactured from black Soft Coal.
That roast red-skinned juicy entire dogs with eyes
bulging from their foreheads hang in the market at Canton.
That So-Chan meditation's frowned on and martial health
Qi-Gong's approved by Marxist theoreticians. That men in

deep-blue suits might be kind enough to file a report
to your Unit on gossip they've heard about your secret loves.
That "Hang yu hang yu!" song is heard when workmen labor
yodeling on bamboo scaffolds over the street outside all night.
That most people have thought "We're just little men,
what can we count" since the time of Qin Shi Huang.

VI

Tho the body's heavy meat's sustained
on our impalpable breath, materialists
argue that Means of Production cause History:
once in power, materialists argue what
the right material is, quarrel with each other,
jail each other and exile tens of millions
of people with 10,000 thoughts apiece.
They're worse than Daoists who quibbled about immortality.
Their saving grace this year's that all the peasants are fed.

VII Transformation of Bai's "A Night in Xingyang"*

I grew up in Paterson New Jersey and was
just a virginal kid when I left
forty years ago. Now I'm around the world,
but I did go back recently to visit my step mother.
Then I was 16 years old, now I'm fifty eight—
All the fears I had in those days—I can still see myself
daydreaming on the living room floor Chinese rug reading NY Times
on Graham Avenue. My childhood houses are torn down,

*See Rewi Alley's *Bai-Ju Yi: 200 Selected Poems.* Beijing: New World Press, 1983, p. 303.

none of my old family lives here any more,
mother under the ground in Long Island, father underground
near the border of Newark where he was born.
A highway cuts thru the Fair Street lot where I remember our earliest
apartment, & a little girl's first kiss. New buildings rise on that street,
all the old stores along Broadway have disappeared.
Only the Great Falls and the Passaic River flow
noisy with mist then quietly along the brick factory sides
as they did before.

10:15 P.M.
Shanghai, December 5, 1984

BLACK SHROUD

Kunming Hotel, I vomited greasy chicken sandwiched
in mouldy bread, on my knees before the white toilet
retching, a wave of nausea, bowels and bladder loose
black on the bathroom floor like my mother groaning
in Paterson 1937. I went back to bed
on the twelfth floor, city lights twinkling north,
Orion in his belt bright in the sky, I slept again.

She had come into the bathroom her face hidden
in her breast, hair overhanging her figure bent in front
of me, stiff in hypertension, rigor mortis
convulsed her living body while she screamed
at the doctor and apartment house we inhabited.
Some electric current flowing up her spine tortured her,
foot to scalp unbearable, some professional advice
required quick action, I took her wrists, and held her
bound to the sink, beheading her silently with swift
dispatch, one gesture, a stroke of the knife-like axe
that cut thru her neck like soft thick gum, dead quick.

What had I done, and why? Certainly her visage
showed the reason, strain and fright lasting thru death.

But couldn't leave her body hidden in the toilet, someone
finding her bent over might wait, then push, then
horrified find her headless, skull fallen to the floor.
I picked her up by the shoulders, afraid to look at
the Medusa head
which lifted by long hair I set
on the sink before the mirror, but beheld no mad
drawn-cheek wild-eyed or blood-splotched wrinkled forehead—
Calm, beautiful face, tranquil in life's last moments
as if in prayer, eyes clear and modest, face content
with neither smile or frown but even-browed, eyebrows
in repose, cheeks colored healthy still as when alive.
"I made a mistake" I thought, in following the doctors rules,
or where'd I get th' idea she was screaming and banging
her head on the wall in neural agony? Was that just my thought
or hadn't others told me so? Why'd I do it so abrupt
without consulting the World or the rest of the family?—
Her look at last so tranquil and true made me wonder
why I'd covered her so early with black shroud.
had I been insane myself and hasty? I left the room.

At Joel the doctor's wedding party the family'd gathered
whoever was left alive. Yes of course they found her corpse,
they knew she was crazy, but didn't announce a murder,
just whispered among themselves she was dead in the bathroom
causes unknown, tho headless, hard for her to suicide herself,
a further investigation would clarify this big mistake.
In fact my cousin my publisher with troubled frown
put the matter to rest, saying he'd call on the police
after the wedding guests go home. I said—
"I might be able to clear up the mystery. You saw
her head?" He looked at me surprised, how did I know
she was dead with her head cut off? I realized
I'd given myself away, but risked it, why lie more,
build up Karma nightmare another year & then get caught?
Police find my fingerprints on Naomi's dead neck? or my blade
be found under my bed, in the dust behind the refrigerator
on East 12th Street Lower East Side, I be arrested
in newspaper scandal? "You saw the head?" I asked
again, giving my knowledge away. "But are you sure?",
he asked. Dressed in his Harvard suit and silken tie
striped red and gold, "We have our legal staff, perhaps you should
consult with them, no fee, fortunate contract,
our clients we value, you for your *Collected Works* we do

protect without question." Helpful, alas, too late for me
to undo the murder of my mother, I must confess, I had
confessed, too late to undo confession and truth, I woke.

December 21, 1984 5:12 A.M.

THINGS I DON'T KNOW

Dawn, a mastiff howls on the porch across the street behind the For Sale signed tree
Chatter Chirp Chirp Chatter Chirp Chir Chir Chir Chir Chance birdie twitters in a tree branch top the maple, Twirp!
I wake, what bird's that, what kind of dog moans so?
Is that a maple or an oak, on Mapleton Street? What flowers weeds & ferns, those in the backyard? What car goes by awhoosh? A Pontiac, swash up the street,
A Chevy, Ford, a Pinto, a Grammarian, a 4 wheel drive GM?
What star I saw last night when clouds lifted & Orion's belt
Glittered gold on blue? or was that amber on azure? As my eye
followed his arrow past the North Star thru the void, was that a tiny galaxy shimmering?
Where's Sagittarius, which way is the black hole at center of the Spiral Nebula?
Where's Sahel where a million children starve? Where's Libya where Wilson of the CIA trained terrorists?
How many times this century'd the Marines land on Nicaragua's dirty flag?
Who killed Roque Dalton? What's the size of U.S. national Debt?
& how much interest we pay each year till the eighties end?
Now the bird's quiet & the dog bark's down, what's differential calculus? How do you fix electric socket wires?
I used to know the names of all the minerals. I do remember Pectolite gave you like asbestos splinters.
How do people overcome panic driving cars? Are bird bones hollow? didn't I once know the look of grackle & scarlet tanager?
Cirrus or cumulus, which cloud produces thunder, lightning, rain?
What makes electricity in a battery? How does my wind charger friction become electric?

When water pours into hydraulic ram, what makes it squirt uphill
when the valve closes in the Pressure Chamber? Is that it?
Something like that?
What're the 12 pix in Conditioned Co-existent Emergence's Chain?
Blind man, potter, monkey tree, boat world, house with seven
windows, what comes next before the man with arrow in his eye?
What about banks? What's common stock & preferred? What's a
futures?
How do you hang a door, frame a window? Hold a light chain-saw?
How fix a broken leg? Ease a heart attack, deliver a baby? Breathe in
the mouth of a man dying at oceanside?
What kind of government ever worked? Who wrote English
Choriambics?
This isn't Trivia (how play that?) this is my life, I can't remember
the name of the lawyer my fellow student, friends with me in college
40 years ago—
How make a living, if I couldn't write poetry?
Would I know how to plant peas, tie up tomato stalks?

21 July 85

ARK 54, STARSPIRE

for Bucky Fuller

*
* *
* * *

"The sight
of a great
suspended,

swinging
crystal,
huge, lucid,

lustrous,
a block
of light,

flashing
back every
impression."

Conjure lesson
from the
ground up,

mortal coil
lock horn
galactic swarm,

domed horizon
measureless
as Zion.

Plain feats
lept fact
incarnate day–

elephant delicate
trunk up
grassblade &

untold greenery
stood sawn
geometry

while cliffed
whole countryside
mount gust

an Acropolis
still told
witholding reason.

Any spade so
terms soil
in season:

swans, worlds
withstood
Odysseus,

Osiris lift
limb by
sparkling limb,

bold Helen
died and gone,
again.

As mole toil
to loam
antarctic pole,

least testament
expound
plowed clay

take place!
of more
than flesh.

Any universe
at all
island enclose

atoll,
disguised unto
Hesperides.

Sever the
ever veiled
however evolved,

Mt. Out
before the hills
hard-kneed

'manfaced'
lion, ox
or eagle

heel!
be chariot
of Deity

—deny not
doubt by
human debt.

Remove above.
Vault earth
devised,

at once
announce full
Arcady.

* * *
* *
*

CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

CERTAIN PLEASURES

There you are, laid back, with eyes downcast, trying to see out into the trees beyond the louvered window, into your open mouth a slender steel rod goes, its needle point traces an oval around a molar, you can see one tree now so close it's as if you were climbing it, and a voice, aimed not at you but to the side, where someone is poised holding a map of your mouth, murmurs, respecting a comma and the qualities of every single syllable: "Number six, a pocket but not inoperable."

*

Being with someone else and thinking of Natalie. Thinking of Natalie while listening to the radio news and falling into a doze. Worrying and rejoicing about Natalie. You know she won't call, but to hope she might is poignant. Seeing Natalie's face, the dark hair, bronze, on her forehead, her pushing it back, the cleft in her chin, a trait hardly visible except in glancing light.

*

At night, the castle. Monument of our neighborhood. Trumpeters stand on top of the tower, heralds, the building empty, demented heralds who blow for nothing, at you and two intervening magnolias. I like the way the trumpets open their mouths to gulp down a hard and lofty liquor, moonshine.

By day, it is the ghosts. Their faces press flat against the windowpanes, angry soldier ghosts, ignored by secretaries. The folds of ghost clothing, a fine flutter.

At any time the mockingbirds, who have been here longest. Their knowledge, of space. Abundance in their songs. Liquid envelopes. On them are imprinted perpetually changing titles and addresses for all bodies featuring in their space. A stream of invitations, with never an R.S.V.P. – Here the castle congealed into its monologue. Olga's glow was thus perceived by K in Kafka's novel. – Of this they sing: a joy unseizable, which life was initially for (and hers is the long memory, a formal passion).

*

Listening to Natalie's voice when she speaks low. She tells me—in her low voice there's the ghost of a chuckle, no trace of the tone in which she confides frightful secrets—that in her home state they did breed a unicorn, not an elegant milk white one, no silver hoofs either, it was "short, a bit brown, like a donkey," except—and up goes a forefinger to point through her hair at her forehead—it did have just one horn, not pointed and long, no, not at all, it was "darkish, and wilted, or stunted." Then seeing how the rosy lips of Natalie recompose the oval form of each eye of hers when she hearkens to me quoting the dancer who said of the Sankajuku dance: "It is like nothing else. It becomes the thing that all else is like."

*

A pleasure is no less distinct for being indeterminate. Held, at a certain degree of indeterminacy, it becomes even more distinct. Then it is diffused, you might say, bodily, bodily diffused, and so, perhaps, less forgettable too. A pleasure is a field, with a brilliant snake rippling across it. (How much would you see of the snake, if you could see it at all?) The snake marks a hair's breadth between a loss felt through indeterminacy and a gain felt through distinctness. Today's pleasure in seeing how jauntily a dog walks down a street past folks patching their houses after last night's tornado, contains doubt as to whether the dog is actually pleased, and, even keener, a doubt as to whether he could ever know how pleased he makes me feel. The same dog another day pleases me, albeit otherwise, because he looks so chagrined. Nothing smells right, or something. His loss or gain?—not to know, either, since he can't, that he *is* a dog. Precisely because he doesn't know, he can perceive, with all his body, the clefts cutting one thing away from another, and all the spiralling resultant outlines, on the far side of any thick stone wall, he can smell out the peacock world around any corner.

*

"He knows what he's saying, but it isn't what he thinks." Hearing this said in French by a steady-eyed Belgian painter with her elbows on a marble table top, gazing past the pine tree, across the valley, and up to the meandering outline of Mont Ventoux. *Il sait ce qu'il dit, mais ce n'est pas ce qu'il pense.* It makes the mountain's outline do a little dance. Her surprise when her breezy saying is picked up, remarked on as having struck home, right in the solar plexus, mine, not his, for he is far away. Inexplicability of that surprise—while, in my solar plexus, I connect the words

with others I heard another woman say, a complete stranger, on the beach ten years before, at Antibes: *Le tout, c'est rentrer avant de sortir.* Charm of such sayings, they make no fuss, they pulverize any context.

*

But is it true that a pleasure is most distinct in memory, only in memory? Catch it if you can, as if flies, I mean catch memory with pleasure as well as a pleasure in a memory. There can be no certain degree inherent in indeterminacy, no dam, back of which to store the energy inherent in a pleasure, except as one captures, altogether solo, the spirit of an occasion. So much for the woes of civilization. To feel the pleasure, then, as others might do, on the same occasion, would be to hold an echo open to the original sound it issues from, one flesh, present tense, a festival. Now I daren't look at that old dog again. A man in Alabama claims it is his pleasure to saw the heads off live animals. In the Whitney Museum, Roxanne talked down into tranquillity a bird in a cage, plainly agitated, part of an art exhibit, only then to collapse, herself, sobbing with distress. I might find only an old dog's remains.

*

Natalie's hands, short-fingered, large-palmed. Her fingernails are claws. You want her to claw the flesh off your bones with them. Wondering what might happen if Natalie could ever be turned around, what life would then be like, and realizing it's hopeless, because then Natalie's behind would be where her face is, so to speak, her haunting face.

Nothing suspect about the pleasure of being haunted by her face. Realizing, too, that bronze indicates not the consistency but the color of her wild woodland hair. Reading Natalie's prose, reading her N at the end of it. It is somewhere between a doorway with a round arch and the tail of a barbary ape hanging down the side of a barrel organ. No, the tail is a fish hook. Something suspect about pleasure in such comparisons.

*

You have invited a pretty friend for tea at four and on the dot of four she arrives. You drink the tea, appreciating the bergamot that gives a wild scent to it, and a homey taste, you bite on a chocolate chip cookie, too. A surprise, from the icebox you take a blue porcelain bowl of strawber-

ries. Into her open mouth she pops a strawberry, and then, having taken a good long look at it, a second strawberry. At six, quite by chance, two other comical friends come by. You open a bottle of red wine, Valréas, the light, silvery milk, flows into the room and surrounds the table, outside two mockingbirds rehearse crescendos, and you are pouring the wine into carefully polished wine glasses, soon everyone begins to curse the government and rage around the room, making their arms go up and down. If there was a trumpet vine growing through the room, you'd like it even better. But you are back at the table again and a decision is taken. We all go to the bar upstairs in the restaurant down the street and meet a flock of French people enjoying the sofas in the bar, you do a little pimping for your pretty friend, and afterwards we have supper on the patio, with plenty still to talk about. If there were trumpet vines growing on the patio, you'd like it even better, but thanks, for now a white linen table cloth and the swish of an occasional passing Thunderbird are quite enough.

*

Webster's (1914) Cahow. This "brown and white nocturnal edible sea-bird, which formerly bred in vast numbers in Bermuda in the month of January, in earth burrows, was exterminated by man." Uncertain pleasure in the dream of a sunlit street, wooden houses painted rose and blue and pistachio, ringed by gardens. In the gardens trumpet vines are held aloft by trellises, in and out among the bowers of vines, in clothes of many colors, many periods, many different stuffs, a few people walk, looking upward, open-mouthed. From places in their hearts they look upward at the clear sky, and then down again to the end of the street. There the sea begins. Along the crests of waves I see cahow nests afloat and bobbing. They are delicately built of seaweed and coral, of whitened human bones, and they are lined with a down which these people pluck from all the pillows, all the cushions they can find in the world.

ROBERT GLUCK

HTLV-3

A small ache harasses my chest—I've wondered for months if it's muscle tension or a virus. Is it my chest or this office that houses so much trouble? I sit on a card chair, cross my legs, and glance at the other men, studiously incurious; I inhale wicked institutional cheer and exhale collective anxiety. I'm taking the HTLV-3 test because my desire to know if I've contracted the AIDS virus is a little stronger than my reluctance. Five to ten percent of the people exposed will probably develop AIDS. I usually write in the spirit of disclosure but I want to clarify feelings and thoughts *before* my medical relationship to the AIDS crisis is established. The Health Center guarantees complete anonymity; even if I decide to make a secret of my lab report, it will alter the way I see myself and, doing that, alter everything. Like other gay men, to be on the safe side I behave as though I'm contagious. An HTLV-3 positive gives that proposition—with some exceptions—medical certitude, while an HTLV-3 negative puts me—with fewer exceptions—in the clear.

I read the endless AIDS coverage in the gay press and articles in mainstream publications. These reports cannot gauge the accumulating sorrow because no language can express so great a feeling; I get an inkling of its scale in the torrent of factual coverage, a deluge of facts, debated and repeated, as though sheer enumeration could save us. I wonder: will a cough lead to pneumocystis, headache to lesions, a mark on my skin to Kaposis? My boyfriend speculates that, like a war, the full effects of the trauma won't appear till the disease is "conquered." Sometimes, in the calmest moments, dozing, an image of myself flashes on my mind's screen: I'm sobbing deeper than I ever have, arms in the air, head thrown back theatrically, as it has never been, as I would never allow.

Immediately I have an impulse to make comparisons and draw morals, to deflect attention from the real trouble, to give a past tense to what can't be fathomed. Anxiety demands a universal to escape itself. All right: AIDS is the disease of the 80's. Why? Well, the destruction of the immune system is an allegory of the breakdown of "basic structures" now experienced by our country and the West. Or: AIDS is bad news from a remote yet governing part of the body (the immune system, the CIA) and I theorize that the virus was concocted by one of the more feverish outposts of government sponsored research. Or: AIDS resembles radiation poisoning's silent decomposition, its scientific unwholesomeness and cataclysmic forecast for all people. Or: AIDS is the result of sexual

imbalance—we were unnatural or too natural (a death's head leers from the crotch).

These interpretations are foolish and comforting, as though finding *what exists* were the same as inventing a moral, as though at some moral's bottom line I'd stop being dazed and scattered. I can't supply meaning to a catastrophe whose real life takes place in the microscopic distance (so near it's far) where viruses are normal and *my* existence is an unlikely game of creation and destruction without any stakes. I feel this chemical remoteness to be the void in its mechanical uncaring and its absolute precondition for my existence. Why ask it for comfort when it illustrates the opposite, that is, the improbability of life. I discover this solitude when I lie awake, aware of my existence, wondering if my breath is labored or shallow, if I feel exhausted or just fatigued, wondering if I should associate the operations of my body, the deep hum or tension that is myself, with the workings of the virus.

AIDS must be seen as this rent in the fabric of life, personal and public. Like other catastrophes, AIDS heightens our lives in a way that we would never want. I'm cast into the region of the uncanny where animate and inanimate blur. I tell myself, I can't die this way, but of course I can. A sense of destiny asserts itself in the face of so many blighted ones—the "me" avid to continue being me comes forward.

With that in mind, can I manufacture some historical perspective? During the late sixties I, and others, glimpsed Utopia for a moment. We saw that the world was the world, not someone's interpretation of it; that life was the fulfillment of itself; that our destinies—our selves—were our own. This revolutionary idea appeared at once on different fronts, and American identity revamped itself. Actually, we merely claimed the happiness and freedom that were promised to us throughout our childhoods in the deceptive fifties. For me, a budding gay man, the new identity meant sexuality. The rules an invisible world made for me had become opaque; I could see they were obviously invented for someone else's benefit at the price of my own emptiness; they seemed to disappear in a burst of laughter. First, we created a mental and geographical terrain in which we could know each other and be known, could recognize gestures and share meaning; second, our sexuality provided a sublime to transcend and dissolve those newfound selves.

In short, it was gay community—well organized, inventive, imperfect, equipped for the seventies and eighties, that is, for urban life, and subject to its pluses and minuses. Unlike older communities, it thrived in an urban setting, in commercial institutions like bars and baths and cafes; it added its own chapter to the history of love in those decades. What other population could respond to urban anonymity by incorporating it into the group's lovelife as anonymous sex? To the degree that my own aroused body expressed the sublime, it broke every social contract, while the in-

vitation to the sexual act unified a community and was its main source of communication, validating other forms of discourse. A gay cookbook? Put a naked chef on the cover. The task of being the American libido more or less passed from Blacks to gay men. Gay Christmas? – naked Santa. As we created the community it taught us a new version of who we were, then we became it. This shift in perception about oneself is almost mystical, with the implied reordering of priorities.

Inevitably, a reaction. The new model showed us that the sexuality we had thought *we* discovered was actually a 20th Century invention, part of an ongoing specialization process – as specialized, in fact, as the 20th Century version of heterosexuality. Science and authority shape these identities as much as we. Moreover, the sexual revolution peaked and declined well before the onset of AIDS. Finally, identity and consumerism share an equal sign more than ever before – urgent greed, as though the American bandwagon were pulling out for good: yuppies, guppies, an impoverishment of life for which we feel rightly ashamed. Gay community incorporates commodity life into its dynamic, as it did anonymity. Still, where are the selves we discovered, the selves that were discoverers?

It's easy to show that the world is distant, life is distant, we have the vocabulary for that: disjunction and pastiche. (Retro modes inform architecture, fashion, politics – let's get *back* to America. The big movies are wry reworkings of the old genres: *The Shining, Silverado, Star Wars.*) But a touch is itself, a meeting place for the body and the sublime; it disregards language which wants to generalize, negotiate. This unique "meeting place" also describes death (if anything does). That's why observance both of sex and death can function as a community sublime. To make death general, to say ten thousand died of AIDS, is an example of how language lies. Each death is beyond language.

And yet: ten thousand have died, more on the way. I imagine – with inescapable racism and also because it's true – epidemics always happening in the Third World. Our last scourge was the Spanish flu in 1918-19, which killed 500,000 – but doesn't the past in this respect resemble a Third World Country? Now gays bear the contempt that the USA has for anyone in trouble. Reagan won't associate himself with homosexuality or a disease. It's a public impulse to silence that affects everyone. I'm still a little shocked when I see the word homosexual in the papers, let alone AIDS, and how confusing to associate the national libido with death.

"Ten thousand have died" – an example of how language lies in articulation and Reagan lies in silence. In bed, when I listen to my body for distant alarms, I am in a time and class by myself. Still, AIDS creates such magnitude of *loss* that now death is where gay men experience life most keenly as a group. It's where we learn about love, where we discover new values and qualities in ourselves. Death joins if not replaces sex as the community sublime. We used to have the baths, now we have the

Shanti Project and other volunteer organizations that institutionalize the approach of death, and AIDS support groups, and safe sex clubs where sexuality is framed by the AIDS crisis. A sex-slave auction benefit for the Shanti Project certainly deserves its own exegesis under the heading Mix-and-Match – and there's telephone sex, changes in sex practices even between longtime lovers (sex acts also have a history), the innumerable AIDS journals and recountings. I read the obituaries in the gay newspapers instead of the sex ads. Stories about AIDS patients and treatments are passed around, traded, repeated; they help me in my solitude; they are the very matter that creates community, gives it its character, its form and being.

But everything disperses before the question, Will I die soon? For that reason it's an unfair question, it breaks the social contract – and it's the only sensible question to ask. What other purpose does the mind have, if not to navigate the body safely through life? Back to the Health Center: a taste of adrenaline thins my saliva. My heart beats; I flip magazine pages; a nurse calls my number; she finds a vein; it fills a test tube. I always feel self-love whenever my blood appears, in a vial or as a taste in my mouth or when it surfaces through a cut or a puncture. These days my blood is an impressive and dangerous substance. It stands alone now, at attention in its test tube like a Messenger from the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. It's hard to remain clear when a jackal-headed scientist weighs my heart against a white feather. In two weeks I will learn the results. Five to ten percent – or is it fifteen? – of the people who encounter the HTLV-3 virus will develop AIDS. I hope I can get out of this alive, the mind says, referring to life and not *able* to imagine alternatives.

THREE POEMS

THE PYRAMIDS

Write the poem
before the pleasure's
lost. Make it yours.

There are disturbances.
Mother holds a scarf
to her face, "Father

I sang so beautifully
tonight. Paste my words
to your lips . . ."

An angel fell under a shadow of conceptions
and the whole atmosphere of immediate danger alluded to change.
Its texture suggests a puzzle, previous to the disclosure
I say not now and it appears now, cast in an eternal circumstance.

The wings cast in plaster are no imitation of perfection.
The sentences describing them don't match. As such.
The sculpted lion in Lucerne is *sans* tongue
Just as some imaginary lover of Sappho might be silenced by a letter
The wings of an angel might conceal a cryptogram,

A herald on a scarlet field, a fortification, a coat-of-arms.
Its wings fluttering without motion from a high cliff
Moving without sound, pausing at the inception of its ascension
An angel speaks silently into the still origins of its own signification.

MY LADY CARRIES STONES

to me. Somewhere they are building
I go for a walk
and all eyes are closed
buzzing around my head
where the box containing old things
mixed with twigs and leaves
catches the bus to the beach alright.
They were speaking soft
to be accepted as they are
itch and scratch
and the dizzy blessing
pays his money quickly
such as gadgets and miniature
long dresses and sticks
yellow petals and completely
half here. They listen
for a check. Wet on the rocks.
Enters the church worried
gets into his car and hurries
like tall stones. My bandages
snap and bite me. Can you borrow
remain here with me? Summer
is transferred to another department
in the 15th Century. Lying there

SIX POEMS

ALL THIS CHANGING TROUBLE LUCK AND SUDDENNESS

Some of what came and some was poor
Some could make it up some sat down
Some to hear someone who was playing
I'm glad to be told I started out
I was little and awful and then I was music
Hearing itself above the ceiling
Someone who was playing some to dance
I lengthened the comfort of moving on
Someone to stand with for a distance
Instead of listening to the noise of a clock falling
A string of fish to all that rhythm
Some I made myself out of my remembering

SEANCE MUSIC

Salt starts falling from my tongue
Will the poem arrive soon
And how will I recognize it

By the pages flying up from the brain
Says the striped man on television
Holding an audible tone in his hand

By its radiant crystal apparatus
Transmitting harmonic interferences
Through the moth-eaten glove of a doll

Salt continued falling from his tongue
As I strolled along the outer aspects of myself
Planting passionate incidentals in the mud

Someone's voice had been trapped inside a jar
And yes
The painting of the poem will arrive soon

And the man with a hamburger bun on his head
And the knight in rusty armor swinging a mop
And the chicken who doesn't need his head to sing

And yes
The man in the prison uniform
Will leave his imprint in the air

DRAGON'S BLOOD (1)

I know all dreams grow to the size of a grapefruit
The highway circles the mountain of red mirrors
I check the map and count the stones
As the train chugs past the painting of your face

The highway circles the mountain of red mirrors
Shimmering beneath my eyelids
As the train chugs past the painting of your face
Butterflies hang upside down in winter

Shimmering beneath my eyelids
Is a procession of men on donkeys
Butterflies hang upside down in winter
On the picnic grounds named after your muddy sighs

Is a procession of men on donkeys
A symbol or an indecipherable ribbon
On the picnic grounds named after your muddy sighs
I've buried my blue and yellow paintbrushes

A symbol or an indecipherable ribbon
I check the map and count the stones
I've buried my blue and yellow paintbrushes
I know all dreams grow to the size of a grapefruit

DRAGON'S BLOOD (2)

I recheck the map and count the stones
On the battlefield's neo-classical plain
Someon's ransacked the archives of description
But the statue knows its electrons are aimed at his body

On the battlefield's neo-classical plain
Men dig for vowels and consonants
But the statue knows its electrons are aimed at his body
Like detectives circling a meteor's imprint

Men dig for vowels and consonants
Looking for the missing words dipped in ink
Like detectives circling a meteor's imprint
They must find what has never arrived

Looking for the missing words dipped in ink
Something poets do, muttered grumpy Plato
They must find what has never arrived
While I try to build the path leading to its absence

Something poets do, muttered grumpy Plato
Someone's ransacked the archives of description
While I try to build the path leading to its absence
I recheck the map and count the stones

DRAGON'S BLOOD (3)

As the highway circles the mountain of red mirrors
How did I get stalled above the ribbon of this instance
A woman harvesting opium
In order to sever the transmission filaments

How did I get stalled above the ribbon of this instance
A pebble wrapped in silk
In order to sever the transmission filaments
When I want to parachute into the well

A pebble wrapped in silk
Do I embroider speechlessness

When I want to parachute into the well
Shimmering beneath your eyelids

Do I embroider speechlessness
While you scatter the rainbow of ink
Shimmering beneath your eyelids
Must I now drink milky tears

While you scatter the rainbow of ink
A woman harvesting opium
Must I now drink milky tears
As the train circles the mountain of red mirrors

DRAGON'S BLOOD (4)

As the train chugs past the painting of your face
Slats of moonlight enthralled and entwined
Tonight, I am a tuft of blue shadow
Framed by a doorway, watching us dance

Slats of moonlight enthralled and entwined
Flare unclasped keeps spinning its astral rhapsody
Framed by a doorway, watching us dance
Held in air by air

Flare unclasped keeps spinning its astral rhapsody
O bicycle of lightning, do not dissolve
Held in air by air
I circle the hours we were alive

O bicycle of lightning, do not dissolve
In a well where wishes are made and lost
I circle the hours we were alive
Locked in a story empty of words

In a well where wishes are made and lost
Tonight, I am a tuft of blue shadow
Locked in a story empty of words
As the train chugs past the painting of your face

CLARK COOLIDGE

from THE BOOK OF DURING

III.

In the room that is all I have left but is bordered on two side opposite with other rooms I have no access to I find myself alone and these things happen. A silver ring falls from the ceiling, hits perfectly on its side and rolls straight to the wall that seals one of the adjoining chambers, strikes this wall and falls down, silence. I have not only imagined this happening, I have partially stolen it. A book I once read comes to mind, in which an insanely repetitive list of all imaginable sexual inventions is enclosed. Bodies in all possible positions and combinations. And in this book one of the kept heroines has a ring through her "nether lips." She rolls on the floor in an agony of delight, thrashes in an orange light rimmed with pale blue. Everything in the foreground is backlit to a most violent blackness. You never see the face of the one who throttles you. Even eyes do not glint in this void. Silence is leaden.

Only a certain type of glue would save you, but the secrets of this substance are hidden in the words of books of an imponderable sentiment. You will read them through anyway and you will not reach the secrets. You will take out your penis instead. "Take out" is a strange and funny, and cruel and incorrect, term for this act, as if you and your penis would go for a walk together in the sun in a park among many delights and questioning faces. They all quite clearly see you and your penis striding in the sunlight hand in hand or arm in arm and wonder at this display, and some laugh, but most frown and soon will forget they ever saw you. It is the ones who laugh that most seriously question you and your penis. One even walks right up to the two of you, stops right in your face and says in a voice distinct enough for all to hear even in the high wind that has meanwhile come up tossing leaves and dog chains, What do you and your penis think you are doing out here together in the glare of all the humanity you could ever wish to apologize and feel responsible to? It is obvious that you will have to go away on the moment, in a rush without forethought and to a land where penises can never be stirred to such escapades but only grow in the ground responsive to the mysterious tides of moons and stars. For glue is all too human an invention and the secrets of its composition have been lost in only the most popular relations of love.

So formal it makes me puke, so formal it gets me hot. The land from the back of the barn descends to the sea margin and no one goes there but a few black and white cows. The lunch was on celery only. Three powder blue ties dimly reflect in the black glass at the back of the display window. I remove my arm from your arm. All these things. All these rehearsals. All these final acts. The world is so formal it makes me rise, the world so formal that it makes me leave.

I doesn't understand us but bugs around. The world in chains of its own solution. An ovular yellow, polished and prim. Crystal vases filled with crystal flowers. No music, but a soft air in slight but continuous movement. Tiny flames. She bends over and strokes the back of my right hand with her left nipple. This precision, almost surgical, deft and yet somehow casual. Preparations, always composed of several. She is naked and I am not. I do not look at her.

Broken eye sights, enameled bottles loose in the sea. I scan and do not look up. I am at night, I am winter, and I trouble you for your sexual portions. The cover of the chest sticks, it will not open to me or to you. The man laughs and reaches inside for his organ. The parts are wholes, but the wholes do not seem to make up into one overall whole. I slip between your dress and the wall. Hammering on the roof. Cutting down on, heaping up from lots of tinies. The last thing you said to me was . . . before . . . Then your blouse is loosened and your breasts can't quite decide on their positions.

Nothing was branded, for me but you.
Nothing lasted, tangled, until the end.
I came forth, and you behind.
The wind the lash, empty at the end of our story.

Who has fathered forth the cruelty of numbers in desire?
The crux of desire, a show of the many held in
plan of the many. A circle of diamonds
in the shallow sod. A tongue tireless in its
sheathing. A sun would not descend on this display.

Held by whatever I had said, you
strained to escape into my plan.
Orifices locked, the diagram is simple, endless.
But the story, to grow greatest heat, must be cut off
well before its conclusion.

Moralism is a word from a vocabulary that I never use.

What is known but a choice between good and bad, choices
between eternally varying goods and bads? And the
man who holds to one over his whole life, he is the moralist?
holding, holding till his ink freezes over in its jar. Sade
was not a moralist, others have overturned that word's vocabulary
upon him. And so much later. He was a diver.

Do you see those words? I want you to know them. I put them
up there for you, above the bedboard, in an ink that tears
the plaster. Burn them into your brain's tissue, that I would
never have to remind you. No one uses them. You are never
to speak them. They are to keep you always from the world of others.

Do you know anything?
I know things.
Do you have them?
I don't remember them.
But you do.
I don't know them.
Where are these things?
They are apparent.
I don't know them.
You haven't seem them.
They are there, in your vision.
They must be shaded.
I've forgotten. I've forgotten which one I am.
You are the one beside me.
With the things.
With things you have forgotten.
I know, I left them when I learned.
Learned what?
To stand, just out of the light from the window.
It's not possible to remember which.
It's a very present one.
The one over there?
The one by me.
Which one is yours?

The compound of putting you together with my cock. Launched at first
with certain tunes, chaotics. The friend who has seen you and then denies
that meeting. That elbow that accompanied you and your handbag to the
corner. Your eyes, one of which is not quite. Hidden breasts, excepting
the swell, continually here hidden breasts. The ink that your painter friend

shakes onto the docket with whip-brush. The tendency you have to wait until all hands are ready before making your play. The voice box, hidden apparently. The whole system of public systems, rented out for an afternoon or a carlot. Numbers on your tie, a phonenumber or a clue to nowhere. Contents, never singular, as there is never only one form. Prepositions that hang at your lip edge. The recipe for sound and image. And that truck that would only load your words. I have put these together without you. Then I have awaited your very passage.

The picture one has of everything is not the picture of things. Is it the busted shape of one's own power? Or a scrap tacked to a wall over the bed or working table? Mine in all its sweeping neglects. I am right here. I look up and expect to see through the ceiling the people of the future. I expect to draw a line that will only end at my death. The sheen of a penis between teeth. The "among" is what is hard to grasp. How I stand with you. The very nakedness of size. I have found things that would awe you but connect not at all with your life. We go on to the next. I want so much that you would instantly fuck into my any and all fascinations. You stand down off that raised board and erase my drawing. You have come up again and again in my speech. And that lightbulb in the raw ceiling hovers in my dream like my dream over all the possible dreams to control you. Our sex performed on only one strut of the craft. Outside and beneath are all the lands spaced by hums, a total cereal. The morning currents so hard to stick by.

The fucking guy showed up again. He had an apparent religion, his stick. We were caught by this shiny black object, length, obstruct, tenementary bar, median for the course. He stopped in the room and lined things up, the stick with things that is. We watched this beveling activity, anxious that he would kink and drop things on us. Dream of a burst ceiling bulb peppering the gels of an eye. On one wall in letters of gold lay our lists of desire, but he paid these no attention. The lateralness of cold became a definition we couldn't squint away. Obnoxious, he still had strongly to do with all this. As if fucking be poised in one body with appendage.

I didn't know where to get any of that and I came back. We'd hung out with little kids while pretending our name was "Ox." I had read the book where the little girl turned into things. I wondered just where I could get the juice in tiny wooden bottles. Only in that way could I. So could you have too. But neither of us knew where so we came home. Nights were waiting for us, walls inscribed with fountains of jet. Leap-frog lingerie. No one stopped us from trying to excite through windows others in near apartments. New York City was just an aisle and then another aisle then. Troopers on the moon. Amber lighted laboratories instead of schools all

around. Shades where we gathered speech. Speech that refused to penetrate as far as anyone. We tried out and didn't come back. And then we did. It was tiring. Only sex wasn't. "Don't tire me out, I have to get up early in the morning" wasn't in our vocabulary. The older we were the thinner we got. Nobody had or gave lessons. Things like music and pins. We bent over and once something came through. I could even allow him to stand on me, straighten my breasts. It caught us like a lock that won't give. Immeasurably in front of us and incapable of wish. So eventually even the trees gave way and we began to love the unhindered darkness.

The tree is too straight, it doesn't have a hat. The ones who live in series have lost their count. The space of everything *is* endless. Are there things anymore? I have lost the doorway to my house somewhere along. Everybody giving back to me the story of their story. The doors of the Food Arms never close. And I do have to see you somewhere, don't I, later?

Empty space (Is there any other sort?) is impossible (hard) to photograph. She knew this, had found it out, and fucked more rapidly (and oftener) as a result. In space there is no result. Infinity should shore one up. The camera glowed in her hand (stopped in time). The time it takes to cross space (take it in) cannot be stopped (caught). There was a laugh in the hallway and suddenly no one had known her.

I was sitting so far apart from her that to understand her was all I could do. Do not proceed to the door. Does anyone figure the trees while sitting inside setting the words? The words are not space. My hand is what with its pen? Nothing between my legs but a sex and space. The rhyme does not log any minutes. It is a space insisted. In this room everyone bulges away from the camera. Whose fault is all this rustling edge? Nine times I said to her, Nine times will cure your fault. It will curl into a marvel of delirium. Bright and edged and salted and a sort of part of your next bordering fucking nightmare. Three women in the same chair.

I can't think about what I think, loss of ready memory. Piercings precise as forgettable as your own talent. I could take you along with me down there but it would do no good. What things you would see there. Lights in back of heads, perfect pencil flights betrayed. Perfect bending stalks glazed in winds of breath. You apply gummed stars and moons and flakes to your chest and breasts. Shaken. Bold and bended. Bowed and left. Empty lights in the dream shadows of fucking and tearing. Leg in the way, rip it out. List of stations on the way to the cunt. I lick your staring eyes, never their lids. You are crying in my dream and I make to stop you with a whistle, crying in. Stopping the window from imagining us. And then (now) I don't know when to stop anything.

The cigarettes come precious and nobody has any left and my hairs are falling out. Liars to my collection allow me freedom. They are stopping in with pictures, troubles at the edges of being and the world. The world of time that space keeps hindering. Ice viewing pressure with a blanket. Tits above your eyeballs grown into your scalp. You turn in a fit and squeeze the windows dry. We don't go together but keep emerging from each other. Writing is not fast enough to emerge from space. My hand should turn a gate. Your eyeballs should *be* nipples. I should scrape this page clean and declare (prepare) nothing. A stack of parentheses on the hallway table refusing access.

Take off your lips. This is a take-off on lips. An entrance to the avenue of wooden (woolen) snails. A car park lit with barn lights. A puzzle. A noodle on licorice stick. A where do we go when we get back from there, anywhere at all but precisely several. Nods come here and stanching thighs. She loved the way the blood would flow and warm and stream down. These were her years, these sticking seconds. Thirds, and in minor, and relaxed away from the thinking crews. I could make anything to happen in a folding bed. Sex by numbers, and in scissors and caulking. She bends at the belt and removes her hose. 1949, which no one is following. The music all came out of the rooms then, and friendly strokes became pestering posts. The paginated day of noon photography. Night always came in the afternoon. The way the *came* of orgasm always sharper in that past tense. When the shades suddenly fell and he would drop by and we would fuck.

I continue to see people who do things. I live down below it all in the soon to be thought about cellarplace. And no one says to me "Avenue sinking." Lights went out whenever I found my bathroom. You'd have to turn yellow to grasp the frogs I've seen. It's mumbo-jumbo these glossaries of the world. "Legions of Hell" on a postage stamp you'd half lick and send to anyone stammering. The glasses of windows, yellowed at the edges, began to seep in, and you'd hoped to control lives beyond the pane. I'll live later, tell me about this now. Het up with the fraught flakes of violences like duels. Pump the shovel and save the wad. Enter full rooms and limp through them, describing and shattering. Nothing needs an outline and so you do it. The fuck in the corner is no longer. Now it centers all your failings, fallings down at the flick of a not seen. Colors have seemingly taken the place of nerves in your heart. The masturbating typist, she wheels at the windows through all the following nights.

Is all this fragmentary and peculiar because you *can* see through it? Is this the name always fallen through the wall next to the picture you nearly

want to have? Are my potatos the same as chairs in the place of no windows? Why do I go on in here?

In the room was a cup, a plan, and nine almonds. We fear them. Leave them there. Step over to where the light is darker, more modeled by lack. So many times more the temperature than what I've seen. Many of them are here, totally separately. Lift off your hand from the visage of one eye. I can't see you for the scrawl, the clung weight of hips rushing. Everything here flips far from casual song. A part of the well tones the fuck makes. Outline my eye. Prod my nose. Sink a vase between my legs. I own you, overbalancing behind you. Avoid last things. Stop making things up. Fuck.

I don't know how you make it energy. There is a wildness in her that streaks the plates but doesn't rise as far as the head. Try one smaller. You'll see me do it, I'm telling you to. Grow bigger and your nerves will be smaller. Ice shows. Tremendous how it could be there. I solved the problem, figurehood. But I don't know, it doesn't seem very possible to me, living nextdoor. I withdrew my head. People always tell you about it, all decked in possible fittings, stagnant avenues at the bottom of the street. Whole rippish push of shattered glass across from him. We went out, exactly like that, again and again. Tremulous velocipede, and you say there's no repetition! My look and your reverse. Tender bones in leather sheathes. Round the time we all came back a rope appeared from the pole. Crazy to think of it, better to rove. That we all had known that her hands were bigger than my hat, I don't know how.

PAPER HOUSE PART ONE (a-o)

a

one box falls out of another box, ashy covenant of separation
two birds, one clamp, no reaction just hanging there as the arrow
moved
notes put the map back into the water
they don't notice what they're learning
name all the days, parts of them painted to look out of control
then crashed into a tree
letters in the boxes in the light old lady opportunity
the mirror ceases to be right here, pressure on the hand
sends a biscuit to the mouth
a circuit connected by eyes stopping watching
quantity of information in the type, nation in the line
or lines
legs broken and maladroit preview a long corridor filing against
walls engaging hands going without end in the corridor
back to front to quay, cracking of wood, a miner's ladder
five meters high
notices filled with objects
later, however, a gelatin lit up, Chinese cryptesthesia,
American music
mural fold or fist, magnetic moment measures behavior, thinking
penetrates slowly
start over a sensible solution, a compact rower's body zippered
into an orange flight suit, all the confidence of the
Chinese navy
exposing a big area extinct of life forms

b

off the wall I lie in bed
vegetation overhead

I should have made a mistake
all tucked up in song
if I be a wall or door
draw me like a cedar board

c

news flies through the air with a great constriction below
    the throat
false distance puts the teeth back in
the singer reads absence backwards
    resting close
in is by means of a phone in the drawer by the bed
the painting is thinking the weather goes dry and flat
this fold carried by air contains no other object
cat's eye or reflection's midnight in this bed of books
    returns things through things
restores things made of paper
    discolored secondary paper
false topography reflecting different intentions
    and starving
both sides of the page at the same time
beautiful and badly made historical documents
faces of wood indicating there's no one at home
    and made not to last
today science will explain everything imperturbable
    contradictory as a credit card

d

what strange turn of the head or is it the earth
    which starts to shake
as we have parents we have a favorite boat strong, well-furnished
    crystal to sing down the danger

without counsel see red, see antimony, little marble wave
why to me
why does it turn to me, a reductive story all white, all red
I'll jump into the sea
dig a hole with both arms, bury eyes in it
a nation that apologizes to its war dead, securing the chain
that binds both arms
paper is as paper does I saw more of you in Paris generous
exile hospitable will last as long as you will last
keep my pretexts and live

e

a secret hill always dear
separated from the last horizon
endless setting and watching
silence in fingers separated a little
wind, seasonal vocal comparison
comes in, pulls a person's hair out
ducks a person in the sea

f

stop motion hands hot country

a lesser noise divulged between the poles

"Silvia do you remember the weather when you were alive"

so youth gets up draws a light study gives the ears the
better portion

concern won't change its color, against the snow a high-powered
beauty – indivisible like the hidden measure we don't speak about

g

all the years of work have resulted in a complete dismantling
two birds, one fox, some anger
disentangled
notes back into the water
is its
own misreading
what they notice
gelatin filled up with behavior
starving discolored things
that is, faces made not to last
of course in time suppression weakens structure from within

h

all the instructions on a thin plastic strap inside hold him
    lightly like the day, for you are a book, ashes, dust
"elixir of reminding sweeps secrets off the page" selling
    papers daily
to build an oak leaf house, purple and stapled
mosaic of pressures
mechanical hands deliberate but intentional
imperfectly matched
the way the light
look at me
a growing disability to remember

i

an original event does double spontaneity, lies in small steps
to dissimilarity, doubtful things, hinges misfitting the inscription
numbered sets the opposite of numb to feel the sentence

j

who edits for drawing
is a burden
and cannot tell
which is which

k

I think of him as a house and as an ordeal
"The house brings the idea of property and connects to
    a cluster of fears concerned with women and desire . . ."
a planet caused the invention of a table, house removed
    veiled blue, dark lady, dark horse
the body constitutes community you can't ellipt it
faith in permission a method or system records how we came
    to be effaced
desperate to conserve matter living and receding

l

writing burnt my tongue
reading a book
or feeding the fire
developing old pictures
released the image
you really ought to see
Ste Refrigerator
cries real tears

m

that dictionary may be a companion to art but life
is the most sentimental thing there is
lying around in sub-text hard-pressed to find a resting place
silence notes its own misreading
tonics of anger, haunted house
the gummed tape is taking a lot longer to remove
than (we had) anticipated

n

by definition born nation is as nation does remember everything
it reads
but this is time, this is truth, take no notice of it, this thing
is short for something too long to write
this bracelet was filled with water and gave off a peculiar odor
which permeated the room, a blue glow
numbers, cognition, the painless life, nation I would have you be
this used to be a crystal waterfall where all heads only seemed
to fit
one insult adjective long line deserves another vegetation beyond
understanding
the dream said night lasts but wasn't didn't you once talk to
your desk, give it a face

o

rekindling
things are constant
recopied from books
found in them

THE BILL

The waiters arrive, with their Byzantine platters,
under the turret: a stripe of colors that taste good,
but some of the colors are flesh, like us,
and so we put on masks while we eat,
but the fish and the fowl are not so disguised,
we can break into the embassy of a crunchy
deep-fried cod, or tug the wings off a quail,
animal meat is served in cuts, chops, burgers,
there is no way to justify eating part of an animal—
I have, and you have, for years,
sweetbreads kidneys each with its cluster of mythologies,
in 1905 what went on in Chicago slaughterhouses for men
women and animals
equal to Solzhenitsyn's documentation of the Gulag.
My own father worked in a slaughterhouse for over 30 years.

I suppose that if we took every act down to its effect on the other,
walking across the grass, killing flies in August,
has something suffered for my clothes, or my coffee, my sugar,
Northrop Frye wrote in his book on Blake:
someone is always suffering horribly somewhere . . .
we can only find pleasure by turning away . . .
we have to ignore it to a certain point or go mad . . .
for joy is based on exclusion . . .
the Yule log can blaze only because the starving beggars at
the window have, for the moment, been left to freeze . . .
That statement, which I quote from memory, has always haunted
me.
The purpose of art is to regard, with flinching and unflinching eye,
the entire spectrum, so that my pleasure is seasoned with
Salvador outside my midnight bedroom window, and
the death of a steer by looking across the table at you,
who I love,
at Manoir de Lan Kerellac this past August.
To fully face the beggars is to work to alleviate something that
appears to pour forth with no let-up.
Is that what I am here for?

We did not have this conversation at Lan Kerellac,
but we have had so many like it
that I can see myself cutting into my duck breast and
speaking to you, seriously as we say, enjoying
the warmth of the wine,
the act of eating, and being with/talking with you,
so that it is a ceremony with the slaughterhouse, or poultry
cage, under our feet?
This most crucial need, to imaginatively experience what
nourishment involves,
is so overwhelming it threatens to deafen,
what I want to do here is to amass some of it,
"Dearly Beloved" background piano, the psychological wells,
the places in which we are suddenly Bosch-naked,
let-go into bottomless black wells
where the seahorses and octopi of fantasy will curl near
and we will enjoy the rack of lamb, the point will be rareness,
garlic, a rosy look, in the context of this handsome room,
are we at base two infants looking at each other across an elaborate
nipple system?
Are we forever on Her alpine-slant, with picks, digging our
ego-way inward?
To converge in the sun?
But it is night—*dinner.*
We know better than tigers, but we are cutting up what we did not
even kill,
even if you are not redolent with perfume from a scraped
civet cat, or in mink,
if I really look at what I have on, I am sure some creature
has suffered for my or your or the waiter having/wearing it.

At the wild animal restaurant in Düsseldorf, 1978,
we looked at the menu, sniffed around and left.
There was something inherently wrong about ordering lion or snake
there (was it that someone had remarked: they get their meat
from the local zoo?)—
and it does not bother me to gut a fish, or clean squid, to handle
calf brains—
they are part of a sensual compost, gratifying after a day of
sitting/reading/thinking.

Am I suggesting that it does not matter what we do?
That the plug was inserted into the Western wall 3000 years ago,

and the power has been fulgurating since, steady, with steady
off-shoots,
every dead-end researched/recircuited,
and that to stop eating mammal, let alone fowl, is a salute-worthy
"right" quirk—
are we "really" in a feeding frenzy over the ancient animal mother?
Part of a "great operation" with our knives & forks poised
around a 20th century version of "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr.
Tulp?"

(I am an endless loop-the-loop on these matters,
trying to turn every facet into a public spectacle,
I want poetry, without losing any of its primordial power,
to be the lance head jutting into the midst of any discussion.
I know that I will lose, certainly in America,
because I will say anything—if
it appears to contribute, if it appears to cast
another ax-head-image into this congealing that seems to be
unstoppable)

Is there honorable vs. dishonorable suffering?
When a lion sinks claws into an antelope, out of instinctual
as well as appetitional hunger, is this right?
vs. monkeys bashed, skulls broken, to test crash-helmet conditions?
The lion is outside my moral ken, I suppose I'm outside his,
yet I have an ape body, keener for fruit & vegetables than flesh—
but monkeys crack lice like French nuns investigating
the mind of Rimbaud—
the ghastly truth seems to be that most of our killing is
dishonorable because
it is out of whack with what the spinning mind of the earth
appears to intend—
if earth is a lifeboat and all the arkfolk are represented,
the human beings are putting away ¾ths of the food.
There is something so shining and "other" about animal life we
admire because we are at spectator-range from it—
as if they are down in the arena and we are up here, fishermen
for souls,
as cartoons we "love" them, for they porter our fantasies,
we elf-kiss their images while we plunge plastic forks into
their spectres,
but nature, from any viewpoint I have been able to figure out,
does not treat itself that well, unless you imagine yourself
as a pulse in the food-chain,

and we cannot imagine that, we cannot imagine ourselves fodder
for a 50 foot wasp,
caterpillars in whose soft backs a submarine habitate of wasp life
is to be planted, and hatched.
We cannot imagine ourselves as what we are not, nor as what we
really are.
If we were to set ourselves the task of imagining and recording
via our own fantasies
the lives and interactions of all the creatures we know about
might that be a culture so involving that militancy toward each other
might relax?
Any point that anyone makes that smells "serious" now looks
ridiculous.
But the nadir of the ridiculous, the point at which what is
ridiculous can be opened & played with, is at hand.

But the patron now wants the bill to be paid.
Wordsworth is way over there, in a dark, forest-green, lit corner,
he's old, and sad, but he pays up. They threw Rabelais out,
an hour ago, but he is of course down the road in a tavern,
eating, and drinking a cheaper and more crucial wine.
Bill and Flossie Williams simply ate, paid, and left.
Jack Spicer and Hart Crane have stumbled down into what appears
to be a "cave,"
but you and I suspect it is merely an old escape-tunnel from the
castle this place used to be,
it leads only to moss and a rotten-bottomed rowboat . . .
Why did none of them come up and chat?
How is it that we are always alone with the matters that most
concern us?
Have the others done us a favor by not chatting and offering
their opinion?

The bill. Is it a making supple of the tendon of will,
which can be a weakening, or elasticity, will the butcher
think about this?
Or will he find himself out of work, for this reason or that,
and go on to something else without ever reflecting on
the animal blood he has absorbed in the gloves of his palms?
The more one thinks about man, the more one wants to undercut
this power, but in thinking, what is being undercut?
Is there honorable vs. dishonorable suffering?
Yes! But to draw the line between the two, one's hand will
disappear in miles of fog beneath the Andes—

and only the severed wrist will continue to sign laws!
This is a hard bill to pay. If Caryl does not mind
I'll have a 1947 Darroze Armagnac.
Crane has returned from the "cave." He doesn't come over, though.
He insists on being by himself—sailor-oriented? Which is ok by me,
I'm so glad he is still with us as an image.
But the bill. Do I have enough? Superficially, it looks like a faded
American flag.
with a groaning list of the sins of our leaders and their dupes.
I'm one—
I heard my voice ricochet—I'm one—and at this point,
over the years, when it has happened in poems especially late
at night pushing to open the poem to a registration of
the contradictions involved in writing poetry today,
I've tensed to the point that if suffering could not be solved
right here and now, the poem was useless. Extraordinary moments,
in which the room walls began to march toward the typewriter
with each pecked word—is this the altar ego? When piles of dead
fowl and the unclear amassings of mental sacrifice begin their slide,
when the weight that one feels of the world tilts toward
in my case the typewriter, and you try to find A Word, or
A Way (that will be true to imagination, not to theory)
to head this onslaught off!

But just now, the sense of being a dupe, one of "them,"
seemed to be part of my most active thinking. What I owe,
once the debt is dropped in the word nation, is an oral and
a literate art! One in which the terrestrial woosh of the warthogs
is spoken, while the digital surrealism of warthog mugging
is put on the screen. I've cleaned up my act, sold all my vacuum
cleaners
and gone home, fini, end of the season, pal. And with that
I watched myself depart, I cursed myself because I had no solution,
nary a single gimmick to tree myself in paradise.
All the alphabetic noodles were wobbling like strippers on
a penny-hot stage, even the mammal consternation I thought I had
begun with was in language evaporation. I did what I could,
I threw out

This Ode

I love to watch Caryl eat fresh Dungeness crab.
Her plate, heaped with cracked ice, topped by
a reconstruction of the crab. Over which her delicate

fingers, more delicate than the morsels
she will extract, pause like wands, and she slowly eats,
as if she were undoing a sewing, as if her fingers
were needles investigating music, or thinking about
"the most sublime act is to set another before you,"
which can refer to any act of respect
for the otherness all nearness is, not to be worshipped
but revered in motion, in pleasure
scythed and harvested, a beautiful creature eating
a beautiful creature.

10-16 January, 1986
Los Angeles

THREE ESSAYS

What is the meaning of a symbolically perfect and a physically faultless perfect art? We recognize the autonomy of modern art, that art is a privileged sanctuary and an instrument for pleasure and sensibility.

But modern art is more than that. It has always represented freedom to the artist and a gate to the future. Such an art must be open to all manner of freedoms and represents at its best an ideal and platonic world, that is to say, a world whose hope of perfectibility is symbolized in its art.

America claims to speak as a free society. But the mindlessness, aggression and frightened brutality of the United States towards the underprivileged of the world contradicts this claim.

When we destroy the Vietnamese people, the forms of our society and the perfect forms and abstractions of our art are *threatened.* Western man's God-like self-privileged creative privacy is threatened.

It is impossible to export fascism and destruction, to burn and drive peasants from their homes, and maintain the dream of the perfectibility of art.

For if American aggression continues, the freedom we Americans have can only be a partial, privileged freedom, a privilege of affluence, and therefore a lie. And art and its dream of perfectibility and freedom is also a lie. Art is the record of a civilization and if America exports fascism, then its art—its art which claims to speak of the possible—no matter its scale or intention, can only be an esoteric and frightened separation from what is the fearful truth.

Feb. 4, 1967

GIGANTOMACHIES

"Gigantomachy" (III), 1966—6 figures, the main figure is violently kicking a recumbent man, one spectator flees in dismay, the others reach out or stand aghast. The canvas is 18′ x 9¼′—and significantly brutal. Gigantomachies I and II are 24′ x 9¼′—groupings of terse actions, figures flay or strike out.

Man is gigantisized in a near-epoch of automatized war. These giants, grimaced in rhetorical anguish, are implausibly frozen or schematized – a function of their distance from us. Yet they demonstrate necessary rhetorical immediacy and existential precision.

The strategies of figurative art have something to do with the scale of man's ambition – in time, history and action – and relate to measurable enactments of civic, heroic or degraded themes.

The Gigantomachies are documentary descriptions of reality, hysterically exact or naturalistic. Thus: a linear battle order, a remorseless sequential rhythm – a synthetic rhetoric of violence and passionate gesture, heroic, near-heroics, the very stuff of late classical gesture, yet roughed-up and stripped of bathos – the severing of violence from specific circumstance or history imploding an indeterminate reality. Therefore: an existential rhetoric of violence within a dwarfing scale by which these gigantesque figures abstract power and remoteness.

Those paintings are barbaric and gross, virtually bombastic in their vehemence, yet are impersonal and terse and make special recall to classic art.

The events are basically realistic and graphically depicted. These gigantesque struggles are representative of vast arenas of violence and public disorder, the harsh tumult and cosmic play of our history.

Indeterminacy and Classicism.

Notwithstanding their size, these paintings are conceived as fragments – the public nature of fragments – that extend in a linear lateral way into our macrocosmic space. As frieze or historical wall, these paintings state a public art, the enactment of serious and declamatory themes, a canon of gesture linking the classical and an indeterminate topical violence. (At another level, they represent a rough-hewn Mediterranean purgatory shoved into the sensibility of today.)

Is it plausible to concede the operation of mythic strategies or an elevated style today?

In our well annotated electronic milieu, man does not exert a moral ego in a defined environment. The artist like the engineer or the philosopher is more a technician of the possible, deft amidst disparate data and structural choices. Commonly, the artist sees little value in the classic.

The inaccessibility of classic or neo-classic art today lies in its remoteness in time and purpose, its eroded traditions and sentimental accretions, and especially in its incapacity to extend limits – the time-space stage of the past. 19th century neo-classic art was turgid, sentimental, corrupt – huge literary machines supportive of regressive institutions.

It is licit to call on a pseudo- or neo-classical art not on idealist grounds but as empiric and existent datum (towards a brute realism) continuing the great measurements of man as hero (anti-hero) of his fate. Such an art must be free from specific myth or history while utilizing mythic strategies.

I stress the classic – in respect to energy, gesture, action and history, but particularly as *brute fact.* Even more strategic, the classic ideas of form are among the indeterminate factors operating on the open modern consciousness. References to measure, order, extension, fate or the irrational free-float out of the past, contiguous into the present, given power by the very arbitrariness and random scanning of scientific environments and electronic happenstance.

Naturalism, indeterminacy, histories of chance and depredation remake the classic. The post-mythical is the existential. There is recall in the Gigantomachies to an elevated style, but the recall is tactile, physical and raw. The monumental is chewed at from a sceptic position.

Yet the viewer is disparate and ahistorical. He views a sequence of actions which are less accidental or fortuitous than his own actions might be. Those giants are greater, more immediate and more distant than his experiences would warrant. The spectator is pulled in, shoved aside, forced to distance himself – the separation is considerable due to scale, rhythm and surface. The viewer must penetrate the existential meaning of these paintings in order to recover enactment and epic stasis, both of which are far from the instant and factitious journalistic news item he recognizes so immediately.

The normally attuned reductive vision of the art world is equally distant from such a barbaric naturalism. After all, the scale is magnified, at times grandiloquent; the style is reduced in means, crude, a raw wall of seemingly primitivised "myth" and "realistic" encounter.

Realism.

The penultimate definition of realism is that record a civilization keeps of itself. There is a macrocosmic environment and history beyond the art! and the realism of the painting is specified as to how it represents or contains this macrocosm. Our civilization and its "claims," the viewing of power, internal stress, etc. – these are real subject matters of an art, the magnitude, extensions and rationality of its designations and contents.

American art will put on record the choices, mechanisms and sensibilities of the American civilization. These strategies involve the stance of man, how he exerts and positions himself. Ultimately an art must state who and what man is and how and to what ends he survives.

In these paintings I do not make claim on current sensibility. I stress the aggrandizement and extension of violence and conflict in their public magnitudes. Man exerts his great force in epic and existential conflict. I expect public recognition of this realism. These paintings are realistic in scale and possibilities, in the arena and time-space described, and further are realistic even to the uncanny proportions of the gigantesque as testing ground for myth and scale of response.

The Gigantomachies are realistic also insofar as man is reconstituted through summarization. The latter is factored partially from "nature," partially by attribution and agreed convention, partially by circumstance and event. In the Gigantomachies, any disproportion from man's self-acknowledged photographic likeness is a record of the tangible enlargement from the topical into a more macrocosmic and rhetorical scale of reality.

The most immediate realistic dimension is a stripped view, non-ironic, head-on, a terse brutal rude art. Were it to achieve its most ideal public form such an art would be viewed not so much as individual signature but thru its civic accessibility, altho a more likely alternative today would approximate the personification of an automaton who records the action.

Process.

Action in the Gigantomachies is exerted in that peculiarly condensed, universalized and existential time sense of today. This is no-time, that is timelessness or universal time and appropriate to the disorder and amorphic design of our rhetoric. The recall to the past is to today, the "now." Such an existential time *can* become a political time.

Figures are usually grouped on an imprecise but extended frontal plane, sometimes perspectived or stepped into an indeterminate ground. The space is that of a bare landscape, arid, abstract, a no-space, a frieze. The figures move in a frozen battered motion, a progression of awkward interval and degraded proportion.

Gestures are arrested, and articulated motion is reduced schematically. What is brutally transient becomes barbarically inert. The figures when most brusque and rhetorically accentuated take on stasis and a sculptural rigidity that approximates paroxysmic fixity.

I go to late classic art for its canon of rhetorical and anguished gesture. Gesture is a muscular conclusion of stress and emotion, and the form is the logical derivation from the stress. By intent, the form will be partially coordinate to classic form insofar as the late classic definition of gesture is a rational and tactile summary of a canon of gesture under strain. Significantly, more immediate sources, e.g., photos, sketches, etc., are

given fixity in the process of working. Thus realism and fixity can approximate the schematic proportions and stressed intervals of Hellenistic and late Roman art. Just so, an existential 20th century can approach Pergamon, Pompeii, Etruscan realism, etc., as possible integuments of a contemporary rhetoric of action.

The figures are constructed of many layers of flat wedged strokes of paint laid against the large architecturally generalized body forms. Forms are thrust out of the surface, volumetric, almost columnar—yet are smashed flat and edges often blur into the background. The smashing back is accomplished by horizontal crosscuts of scraped away paint. The fragmented stripped layers of paint set up displaced surface rhythms that simultaneously imply motion and a paralyzed kinetic energy.

There is a secondary appearance of being flayed, cutting thru to the muscle, emptying out the figure, breaking its organic wholeness. This skinned look extends to the infrastructure, the figures eviscerated against the open bare canvas, a complex relationship of paint, emptiness, surface tension and canvas.

The paint is acrylic, in these instances an appearance that is inert, dry, flaked and flat. Color consists largely of Mars (earth) red, black, white, pink, light blue—colors that are eroded but retain sensuous residues reminiscent of earth, sand, sky and water, particularly the Mediterranean.

1968-69

CORPORATE POWER AND FREE WILL

Powerful societies have the means to have art: through the material conditions of the socity, how the society is managed, who runs things, and how surplus is accumulated and distributed historically to artists.

Powerful societies, therefore, have the means to create art. All strong and successful societies do not have great art. But it is a condition for successful art to come out of success; to have available leisure and the kinds of means based on surplus. Capitalism, or particularly American capitalism, is the most far-ranging and capable system in managing today's international resources; since World War II, American power has been predominant. And there are connections between the changes that

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(Corrected talk) Panel: "Radical Art: Theory & Practice," Caucus for Marxism & Art, CAA Convention, N.Y., Jan. 27, 1978.

took place: the transference of international economic resources to the United States and the struggle for their retention in recent years – and the fact that American art became internationally predominant from the late 40's and the nature of its strengths and strategies. Technology is the mainstay, the overreaching power in this society. Technology is the key instrumentality in communication, and communication has been fueled by the information revolution. This is part of the overarching means of both maintaining control and spreading information. Artists work out the methodological means by which we introject these "things" into our thinking/behaviour. We are infected with only partial awareness of what this signifies, with the conditions of communications. "Infect" might be an exaggerated usage because there are positive aspects about this, of course, exhilaration and optimism. Nevertheless, the introjection of technology and methodological means sets conditions of analysis, conditions of art-making and the artist occupies spaces alongside the so-called opinion-makers and the managers of society, with whom most of us, one way or another, belong, or aspire to belong, through our uses of language, our attempts to control situations within and outside the art world, our attempts to manipulate these to advantage, and so on.

We use these means; we almost have to. But they're particularly introjected into art. The capacity for controlling events and sensory responses are largely determined by the information revolution and the whole concomitant series of technological means. This has little to do with success on an individual basis, those series of situations where the artist makes his or her moves to gain success, to gain recognition. For whether successful or not, most contemporary artists carry the means of our society in their bloodstreams, so to speak, and the nature of the plusses and minuses of current art are so geared to information theory. This has a lot to do with concepts of subject matter, formalism, transcendence in art, the artist as hero, et cetera. We inherit and we participate in the celebration of the artist as an individual hero. The hero conquers immediate circumstances and proves to be a superlative individual or exemplar of a particular art development, destiny, or history. We have many current art heroes – art heroes come and go – but those that survive represent and are proof, they are society's proof, that the system works. The success of the individual is a microcosm of success possibilities. There are protests about the nature of all kinds of institutions or mechanisms, how systems or individuals operate, but the role of the artist as hero is sacrosanct.

I recall years ago when *The East Village Other* attacked everything under the sun – there was little that was not suspect to such a counter-culture publication – except artists. Artists, including individuals with great market place success, were immune and exemplary for what they were thought to represent: bohemian defiance, the artist as an outsider, the claim

to "create" form (a God-like function), or the ability to comment on the nature of "reality," all privileged situations, free will situations.

We're reacting to social changes and transformations that are difficult to assess, evidence that the nature of the mechanisms of society are powerful and enormous. The oligarchic, corporate or coercive aspects of power use, which are not ordinarily specifically repressive to many of us in American society today, are certainly evident in a good many parts of the world, where military and industrial elites control the social order and the nature of how information and what information is disseminated.

We have sufficient gaps or checks and balances in the corporate system in America, and the system is run in such a manner that we can still lay claim to free will, the artist here's claim to free will: the artist hero may admit to social determination, to Marxist explanations of the nature of society; however, the artist *demonstrates* through art an individual, subjective free will – the active management of this assertion. A more cynical version would be "don't lay any hands on me, or if you do, don't let me know it." So the hero still asserts free will.

Now, I do not deny that we have free will. I personally think I have a fair amount of it, at the moment . . . particularly at the moment, right? Okay . . . artists in Chile thought they had free will too but no longer. They may never have free will again or at least in the immediate future, as we envision it. The system in Chile was not that different from the system in the United States in terms of external references: nature of management and institutions, corporate power, international situations et cetera. We hope the controls and tolerances under this system in the United States will hold, that the situation will not deteriorate, for example, we do not have, among this group here (at the CAA), many Naxalites. That is to say that the educated who are unemployed who are present in this room have not undertaken the violent actions that were the responses of students in India or what may be occurring in Italy. But we expect that the center will hold, especially when it's to the advantage of many of us that it hold.

So that the game for Americans is not yet over between the problems of corporate coercion and free will.

1978

PAUL LAFFOLEY

THREE STATEMENTS

Concerning *I, Robur Master of the World* (see cover of *Sulfur* #17): the painting is an attempt at a wholistic design for the world, utilizing double layer geodesic spheres surrounding both the Earth and the Moon, at about five miles off the surface, which are linked together through space to form a gigantic motor. I included slow exploding hydrogen bombs for local energy, a flying saucer transformation architecture city—a new Acropolis—actual living architecture and attendant devices.

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DIVINE COMEDY ILLUSTRATION DESCRIPTION

1) The triptych consists of three paintings [oil and acrylic on canvas]. Each panel is 73½" x 73½" framed. It would require, therefore, a display wall at least 25 ft. long by 8 ft. high in order to allow a one foot space around each panel [other display configurations are possible].

2) The three paintings were begun in 1972 and completed in 1975. This project represents a major effort on my part in research and execution. I read Dante Alighieri's poem 18 times, 16 times in translation, twice in the original Italian. Also I researched the manner of illustration used by other artists, beginning with Giotto di Bondone to the present.

3) I tried to make the imagery of my illustration express the system which Dante used in writing the poem. The poem is the journey of his soul through the afterlife while he is still alive and has his body. The journey is separated into 100 Cantos [or Songs] each with its own internal structure. The 100 Cantos are further divided into three Cantica: Hell [L'Inferno] 34 Cantos; Purgatory [Il Purgatorio] 33 Cantos; and Paradise [Il Paradiso] 33 Cantos.

Dante on his singular journey toward the beatific vision passes through his vision of the Medieval cosmos as one would who was pass-

ing through and commenting upon a gigantic cathedral. The architecture, therefore, of the conical pit of hell, the mountain of purgatory, and the nested celestial spheres of paradise are evoked, described and commented upon like an architectural historian lovingly presenting an architectural masterpiece.

In this manner I have shown a cross-section through hell, an elevation of the mountain of purgatory, and a cross-section through the complete Medieval cosmos. Surrounding each main image are the illustrations of the Cantos, like film strips, which present the story-line in complete detail including the amount of time Dante spends in each Canto. The whole journey, in that regard, takes place within one week, beginning on Maundy Thursday, passing through Easter and ending on the following Thursday.

4) To my knowledge I am the only artist to date who has ever finished the illustration of the poem in its entirety. This includes plot action, characters, settings, theological, and cultural references.

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from THE DANTESPHERE: A PROPOSAL FOR THE ILLUSTRATION OF THE DIVINE COMEDY OF DANTE ALIGHIERI AS AN ARTIFICIAL SOLAR SATELLITE

. . . My second proposal for the Illustration of *The Divine Comedy* is the rendering in outer space, in an orbit around the sun, of the entire Medieval cosmos that Dante believed in, within a sphere which would have an approximate diameter of 60,000 miles.

This sphere would be the state setting for a full, detailed re-enactment of the action and personalities of the poem at the scope and scale that Dante intended. The whole structure would be an homage not only to the architectonic imagination of Dante, but also of the futuristic thrusts of Etienne-Louis Boullée.

A: The Exterior of The Dantesphere:

In comparative size *The Dantesphere* would be about 15,000 miles less than the diameter of Saturn, which has a diameter of 74,200 miles. Thus *The Dantesphere* would be considered among the "giants" of the solar system. Only Jupiter is larger than Saturn, being 88,000 miles in diameter.

But its final orbital position in the solar system, after construction, would be determined not so much by its volume, but more from the magnitude of its mass in comparison to the Earth in order not to upset the delicate gyroscopic balances of the solar system.

In mass it probably would be a good deal less than the Earth, since most of *The Dantesphere* would be hollow in terms of both the larger outersphere and the model of the Earth at the center of the large sphere.

The orbit I would select, therefore, is that of the planetoid Ceres. Ceres is number 28 in Bode's planetary orbital series of: 4-7-10-16-28-52-100-196. Numerologically 28 adds up to 10, "The Wheel of Fortune." In Dante's terms, it would mean a completed cycle in which there is an unfolding of unity. Traditionally, 2 is associated with the moon as invention or mentality. 8 is the symbol of fate as the intersection of the material and spiritual worlds. It is the number of total success or failure in terms of humankind's relation to fate.

Ceres, along with Eros, Pallas, Vesta, Juno and other members of the asteroid belt exist in orbits between those of Mars and Jupiter. The entire volume of this asteroid belt does not exceed a thousandth part of the volume, not the mass, of the Earth.

This orbit position is appropriate for two strategic reasons:

1) International mining operations are being planned for the asteroid belt. The personnel and instrumentality, therefore, would be at hand to build *The Dantesphere* out of the remains of the asteroids. Other material could be had by taking some of the smaller satellites of Jupiter.

2) The possibility of concentrating the combined mass of the asteroids, in the form of *The Dantesphere*, at the orbit of Ceres, would not disturb the gyroscopic balance of Bode's Law, which is effective out to the orbit of Uranus. Minor adjustments in the orbit can be compensated for by rocket and gyroscopic motors. Also this proposed orbit is in a zone where an artificial satellite could be heated to Earth temperature with greater ease than it would be to refrigerate *The Dantesphere* to Earth temperature at orbits closer to the Sun than that of the Earth.

The exterior of the large sphere is used as a preparatory environment before entering the interior, where *The Divine Comedy* is re-enacted. The exterior surface is surrounded by a geodesic sphere, off from the surface by approximately 10 miles. The geodesic sphere is composed of transparent living tissue genetically programmed to withstand particle and radiation bombardment, while allowing through it types of radiation which are necessary to sustain human life.

Also an Earth type atmosphere is contained within the geodesic sphere, allowing the appearance of a day and night alteration, only of longer intervals due to the larger diameter of *The Dantesphere*, than that of the Earth.

The outer surface of the geodesic sphere would have rocket ports that connect to 10 mile long pylons, reaching to "ground level."

"Ground level" [which is the exterior of *The Dantesphere*] is The Preparatory Area itself which has the following functions:

1) It functions for a patron of *The Dantesphere* in the same way that the notes, glossary, and appendices function for a reader of the poem itself. Here one would find accurate reconstructions of aspects of the ancient Greco-Roman world [as seen through Medieval eyes] and the Medieval world up to 1300 A.D. These reconstructions, such as that of Florence or the entire Mediterranean Area, would be done in a way so as to act as pedagogical devices to familiarize the patrons of *The Dantesphere* with the world and artifacts of Dante. Archaeological and genealogical material would abound. Moot points of scholasticism would be discussed on street corners as it was done at the time of Dante. The Trivium and the Quadrivium [or the seven liberal arts based on the proposals of Plato] would be taught.

2) Housing and life sustaining areas would exist for the patrons, the maintenance and administration personnel, as it would for the pedagogical patron guidance and scholarship personnel. Besides the necessary housing units, which would have the possibility of accommodating life forms from other galaxies, there would be many universities and individual study centers, doing research on Dante in particular, and Medievalism in general. The results of this continuous research would be used ultimately to improve the presentation of *The Divine Comedy* within *The Dantesphere.*

3) For the individual patrons The Preparatory Area would represent the place where they would be educated to *The Divine Comedy*, in a literary manner, besides the nature of *The Dantesphere.* For instance, each patron would be required to learn all the spoken lines, overt thoughts, and asides to the audience that Dante says in the poem, by heart as well as a thorough knowledge of the whole poem itself . . .

B: The Interior of the Dantesphere:

Descent into the interior would be scheduled for each Earth-time week. *The Dantesphere* would have its weeks beginning at midnight on Thursday and ending at 9 PM the following Thursday. The 3 hour differential would be used via rocket shuttle to bring back one Dante Candidate to the Medieval Earth, and to bring back the one who had just experienced *The Divine Comedy* to the exterior surface of *The Dantesphere.* During the 52,000 mile journey to the Medieval Earth the Dante Candidate is kept asleep. He or she is deposited in "the dark wood" and electronically awakened at exactly midnight to begin the action of the poem.

The structure of *The Dantesphere* interior consists of two parts:

1) The Medieval Earth: at the time of Dante, the Earth was believed to be neatly divided into two great hemispheres, one of land and one of ocean. At the center of the hemisphere of the land mass is Jerusalem or Zion. Directly on an axis below and through the Earth extends the various concentric terraces of the conical pit of The Inferno, straight to the center of the Earth where Satan is forever trapped in the frozen Lake of Cocytus. Continuing on that axis is the portion of The River Lethe that penetrates the Earth, connecting The Inferno with The Mount of Purgatory.

On the opposite side of the Earth from Jerusalem is the island upon which rests the 4000 mile high mountain of Purgatory topped at its summit by the inverse of The Garden of Eden: The Earthly Paradise. The reason The Mount of Purgatory is 4000 miles high is that at the Fall of Lucifer [the bearer of God's Light, or He who could not bear The Light – Pure Revelation – of God], He was trans-substantiated into Satan [God's adversary – The Creature with an infinite number of sense organs]; Satan was cast the farthest away from God possible, which meant the exact center of the Earth. And as Dante says:

> This side the world from out high heaven he fell;
> the land which here stood forth fled back dismayed,
> pulling the sea upon her like a veil,
> and sought our hemisphere; with equal dread,
> belike, that peak of earth which still is found
> this side, rushed up, and so this void was made.

Satan's entry into the Earth's atmosphere was on the axis of the South Pole. The axis of Jerusalem and Purgatory is 58° North and South on the plane of the meridian of the South and North pole axis. At his fall, the land that had once occupied the Southern hemisphere fled before the horror of Satan up to a common horizon of Jerusalem and Purgatory. The ocean filled in the land reduction. At the center of the earth, the soil in order to avoid any contact with Satan rushed up through what became the tube-like channel of The River Lethe. The hole in the South Pole by which Satan entered the Earth filled up behind him, so that as the interior soil of the Earth kept pouring forth, it formed a larger and larger mountain. Since the consciousness of the Earth is limited, God feared that the inertia of the soil evacuation would exhaust the Earth entirely. Thus, God caused an opening to occur at the North Pole. This hole became the entrance to the cavern of The Inferno in the midst of "the dark woods."

The modelling of this Medieval Earth would be:

A) based on a hollow structure system because the interior surface of The Inferno is composed of 20 terraces which are topologically connected as a series of nested concentric rings. The largest ring, or the

Vestibule of The Inferno, is 4000 miles in diameter. The smallest ring which holds Satan is only a few miles in diameter.

The winding River Lethe consists of a tube connected from The Inferno to The Mount of Purgatory.

The Mount of Purgatory is made up of exterior terraces and cornices. From an island base rise 2 rocky terraces; above are 8 concentric cornices. The top cornice with The Earthly Paradise as a crown overlooks a structure which is about 4000 miles high and has an angle of 72° determined from the base.

B) stationary within the structure of *The Dantesphere*. That is, as *The Dantesphere* rotated on its axis, the Medieval Earth would rotate with it. The Medieval Earth would be held by electro-magnetic fields in its position in space. The electro-magnetic fields would act in a similar manner to those of the real Earth.

C) by use of an advanced form of holography. All surfaces and theatrical properties that are possible to do so, will be composed of a new form of hologram. Some surfaces, in order to hold the weight of the Dante Candidate, must be surfaced with real materials.

This new form of holography will be based on the principle of light appearing in space from no source other than itself. Thus 360° viewing of a holographic object would be possible, with no intervening equipment. The method of achieving this possibility will be the result of investigating the internal nature of the photon and psychotronic equipment. Eventually *The Dantesphere* will utilize physical sense simulators for the other senses besides sight. Already sonar holography is being developed in conjunction with visual holography. Smell, taste, and touch including kinesthesia and temperature registration will at some point be introduced into holography . . .

2) The Inhabitants of the Medieval Earth: it will be unnecessary to model living people on the outer surface of the Medieval Earth, as Dante sees only a Leopard, a Lion, and a She-wolf, in "the dark wood" before he meets Virgil. These animals, Virgil, Beatrice, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the Angels, the Human Souls, the Mythological Creatures, the Demons, Satan etc., will be rendered by holography as previously described. The inhabitants of The Inferno and The Mount of Purgatory will, of course, say the lines in *The Divine Comedy* that are appropriate to them. But these hologrammatic models of people will be programmed to make adjustments for human error in the action of the story, as is normally done in playacting. . . .

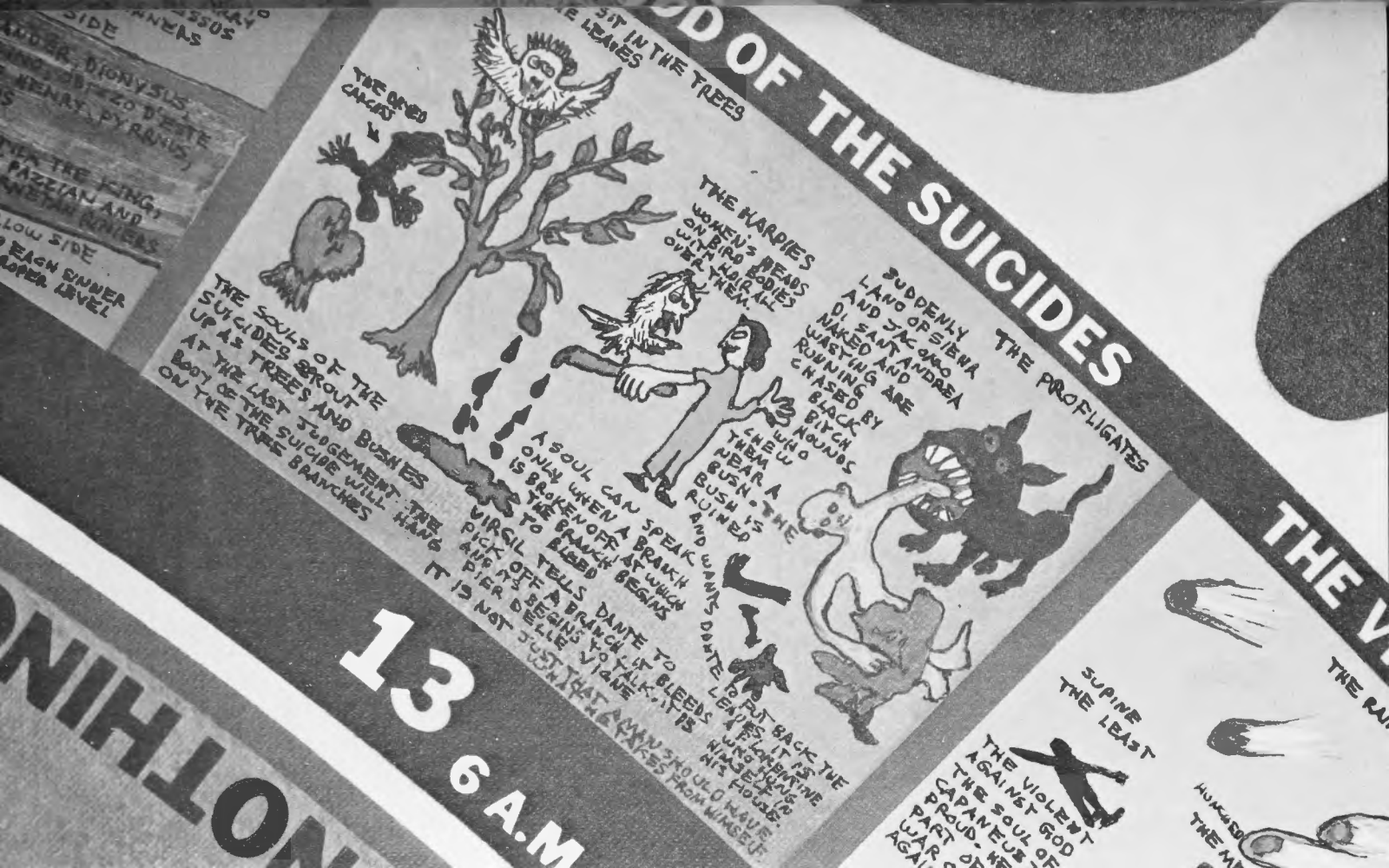
1978-1983

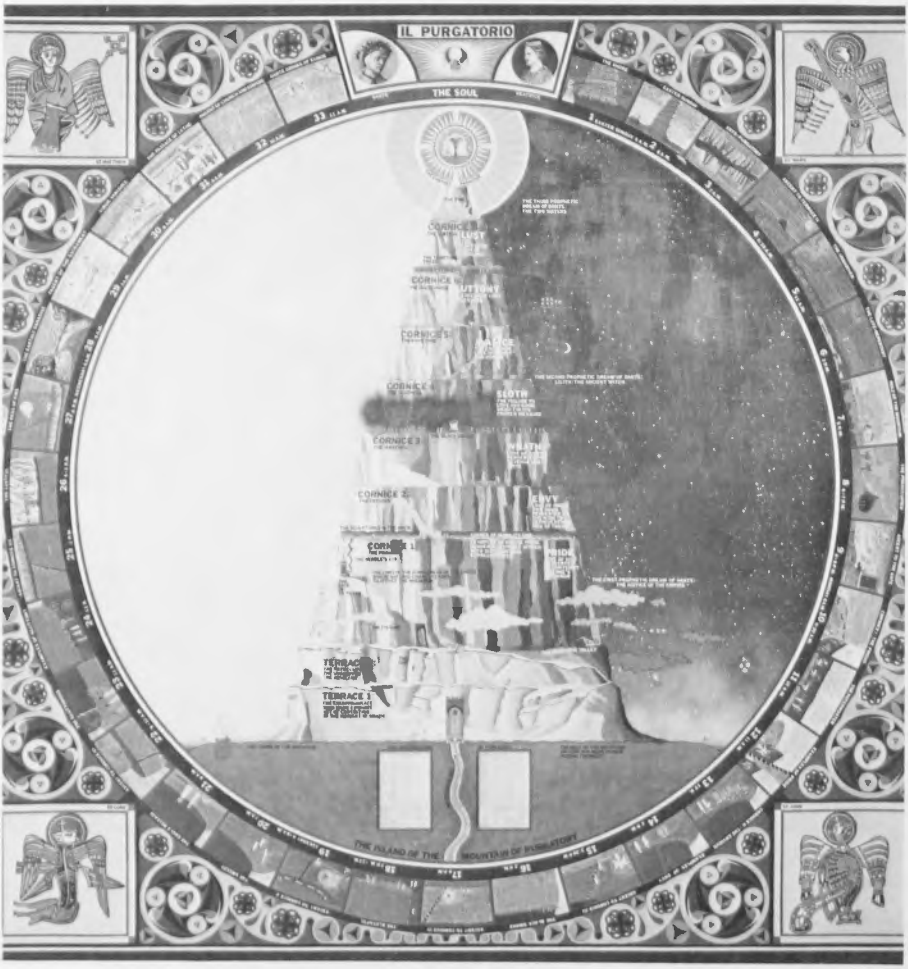
from THE DIVINE COMEDY ILLUSTRATION
by Paul Laffoley:

L' INFERNO
THE DARK WOOD
WHAT YOU FEAR THE MOST WILL COME UPON YOU
GNOTHI SEAUTON
WILL CAUSE THE UNIVERSE TO EAT ITSELF IN THE SAME WAY THE UROBOROS EATS ITS TAIL
IM GANZEN LIEGT DAS DAMONISCHE
ABANDON ALL HOPE YOU THAT ENTER
HELL IS LIKE THE ULTIMATE BLACK HOLE WHICH
CIRCLE II
CIRCLE III
CIRCLE IV
CIRCLE V and VI
CIRCLE VII
THE CITY OF DIS
UPPER HELL
LOWER HELL
VIOLENCE
THE 3 GIANTS
SATAN
SATAN THE ANTITHESIS OF WISDOM ALL POWER IS MINE
THE POWERS WISDOM AND THE LOVE OF GOD BECAME

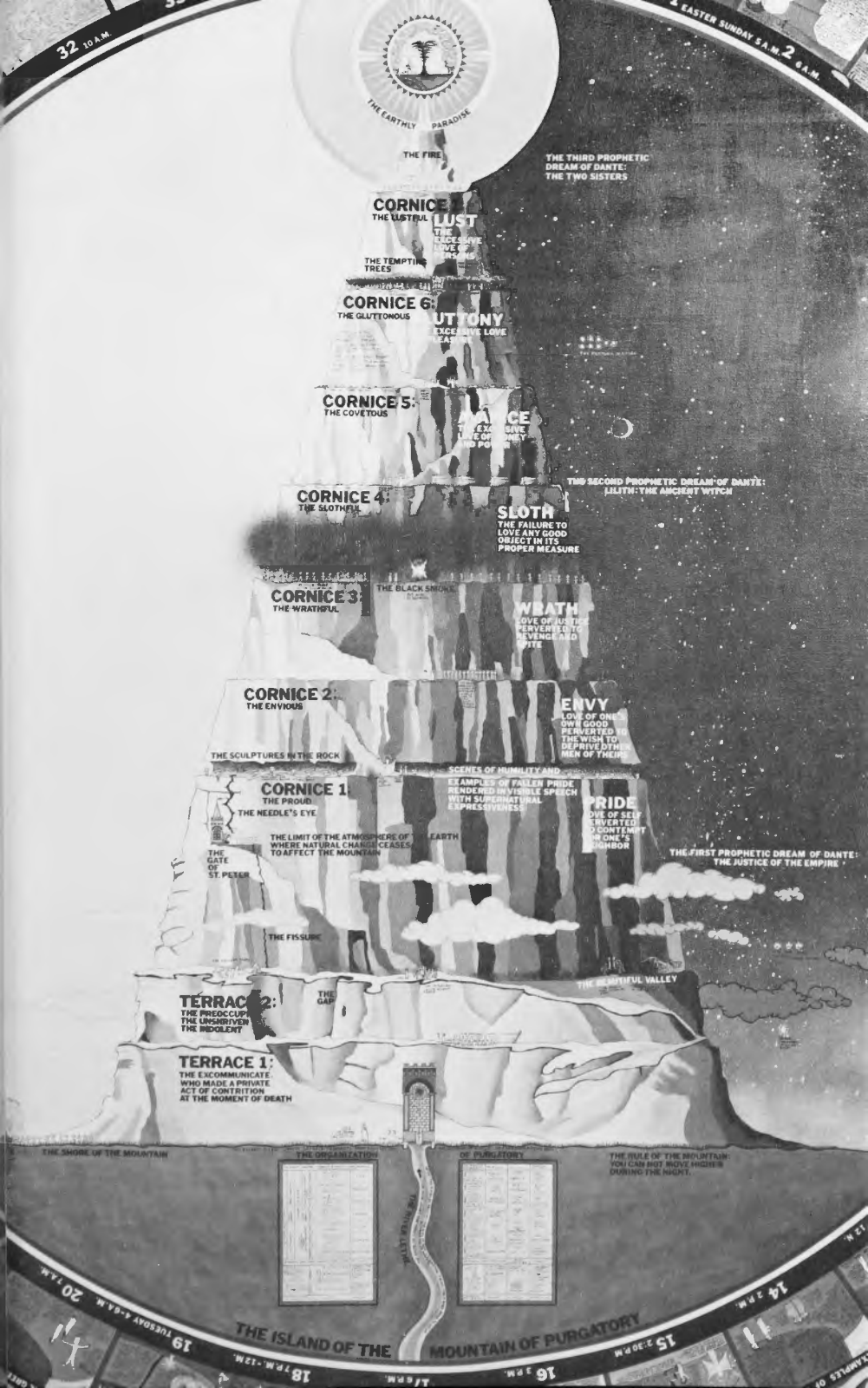
L'Inferno Overall,
followed by two details:
Satan and *Wood of Suicides*

CS
ERERS
RATORS
YPOCRITES
THIEVES
LEAD COWL
THE GIANTS
NIMROD
ANTAEUS
NETHER HELL
ORDER THROUGH
FLUCTUATION
CASSIUS
BRUTUS
JUDAS
COCYTUS
THE
DOLEFUL
FROZEN
SOULS
COMPLEX FRAUD
CIRCLE IX
TRAITORS TO THEIR
LORDS
GUESTS
THE WELL
JUDECCA
PTOLOMAEA
ANTENORA
CAINA
THE
ICE
SATAN
AS
SELF-DEFEATING
KITSCH
FORGETFULNESS
OF GOD BECAME
SATAN
HE WHO

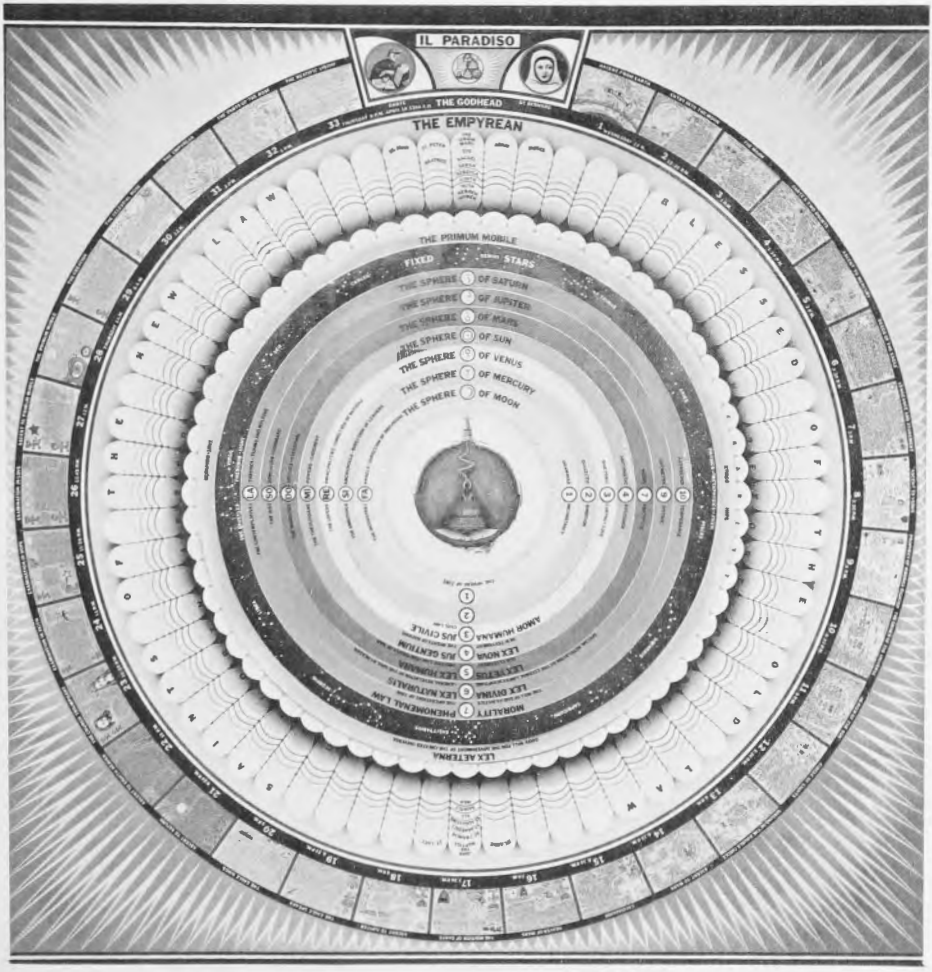

THE SUICIDES
THE PROFLIGATES
THE SOULS OF THE SUICIDES SPROUT UP AS TREES AND BUSHES AT THE LAST JUDGEMENT THE BODY OF THE SUICIDE WILL HANG ON THE THIS BRANCHES
THE HARPIES WOMEN'S HEADS ON BIRD BODIES WITH HAIR ALL OVER THEM.
THE GREED CAGES
SUDDENLY LANO OF SIENA AND JACOMO DI SANT ANDREA ARE WASTING AND NAKED BY CHASED BLACK BITCH HOUNDS
A SOUL CAN SPEAK ONLY WHEN A BRANCH IS BROKEN OFF AT WHICH THE BRANCH BLEED BEGINS
VIRGIL TELLS DANTE TO PICK OFF A BRANCH AND ITS PIER DELLE VIANE
IT IS NOT JUST THAT A MAN SHOULD HAVE PAINS FROM HIMSELF
TO PUT BACK THE LEAVES IT AS FLORENTINE HIMSELF HIS HOUSE.
THE VIOLENT AGAINST GOD
SUPINE THE LEAST
13 6 A.M.
THE VI



Il Purgatorio Overall
followed by two details:
The Island of the Mountain of Purgatory
and *The Earthly Paradise*


THE EARTHLY PARADISE
THE FIRE
THE THIRD PROPHETIC DREAM OF DANTE: THE TWO SISTERS
CORNICE 7:
THE LUSTFUL
LUST
THE TEMPTING TREES
CORNICE 6:
THE GLUTTONOUS
UTTONY
CORNICE 5:
THE COVETOUS
CORNICE 4:
THE SLOTHFUL
THE SECOND PROPHETIC DREAM OF DANTE: LILITH: THE ANCIENT WITCH
SLOTH
THE FAILURE TO LOVE ANY GOOD OBJECT IN ITS PROPER MEASURE
CORNICE 3:
THE WRATHFUL
THE BLACK SMOKE
WRATH
CORNICE 2:
THE ENVIOUS
ENVY
THE SCULPTURES IN THE ROCK
SCENES OF HUMILITY AND
EXAMPLES OF FALLEN PRIDE RENDERED IN VISIBLE SPEECH WITH SUPERNATURAL EXPRESSIVENESS
CORNICE 1:
THE PROUD
THE NEEDLE'S EYE
PRIDE
THE LIMIT OF THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE EARTH WHERE NATURAL CHANGE CEASES TO AFFECT THE MOUNTAIN
THE GATE OF ST. PETER
THE FIRST PROPHETIC DREAM OF DANTE: THE JUSTICE OF THE EMPIRE
THE FISSURE
THE BEAUTIFUL VALLEY
TERRACE 2:
THE PREOCCUPIED
THE UNSHRIVEN
THE INDOLENT
TERRACE 1:
THE EXCOMMUNICATE, WHO MADE A PRIVATE ACT OF CONTRITION AT THE MOMENT OF DEATH
THE SHORE OF THE MOUNTAIN
THE ORGANIZATION
OF PURGATORY
THE RULE OF THE MOUNTAIN: YOU CAN NOT MOVE HIGHER DURING THE NIGHT.
THE ISLAND OF THE
MOUNTAIN OF PURGATORY
32 10 A.M.
1 EASTER SUNDAY 5 A.M.
2 6 A.M.
14 2 P.M.
15 3:30 P.M.
16 5 P.M.
17 6 P.M.
18 7 P.M. - 12 M.
19 TUESDAY 4 A.M.
20 7 A.M.

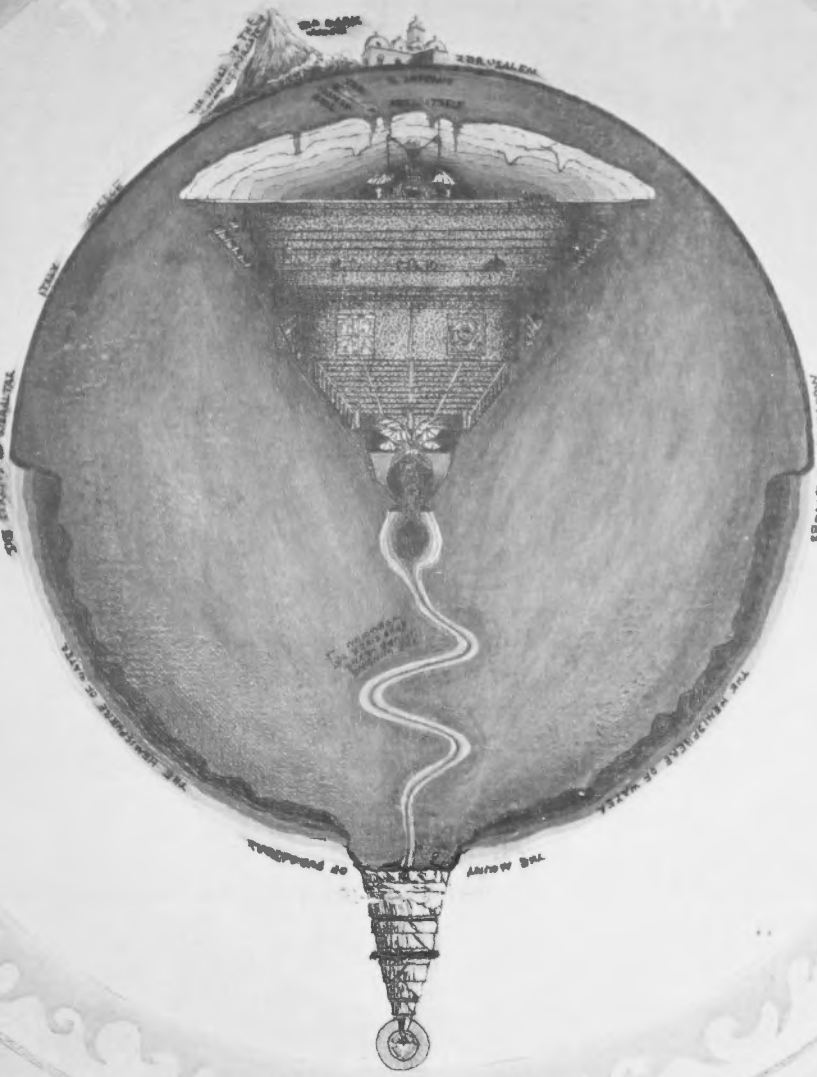
THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE
THE FOUNTAIN
THE RIVER LETHE
THE RIVER EUNOE
THE EARTHLY PARADISE
THE FIRE
STATIUS DANTE AND VIRGIL PASS THE FIRE
THE ANGEL OF CHASTITY
CORNICE 7:
THE LUSTFUL
LUST



Il Paradiso Overall
followed by two details:
Il Paradiso Center
and *The Celestial Rose*

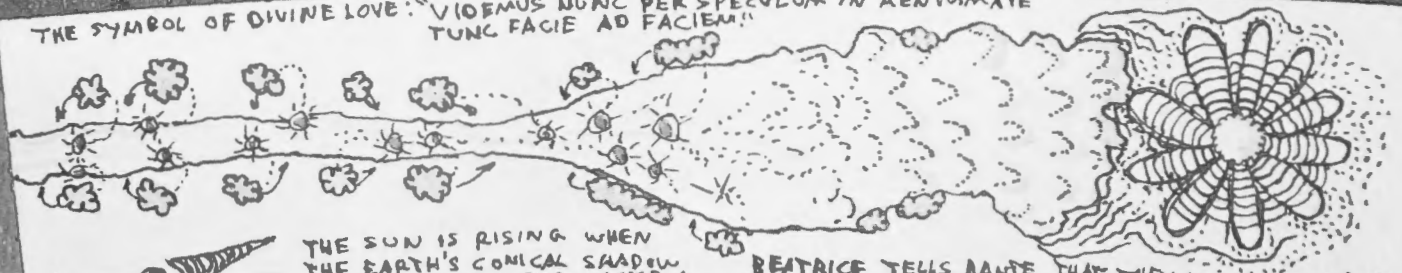
1

THE SPHERE OF FIRE



THE SPHERE OF MOON

THE SYMBOL OF DIVINE LOVE: "VIDEMUS NUNC PER SPECULUM IN AENIGMATE TUNC FACIE AD FACIEM!"



THE SUN IS RISING WHEN THE EARTH'S CONICAL SHADOW FALLS LEVEL WITH THE HORIZON [PERCHANCE 6 HOURS AWAY]. IT IS AN HOUR BEFORE SUNRISE WHEN THE STARS ARE STOLEN FROM THE NIGHT. [AURORA'S] EVERY SOUL FIRST ENTERING THE EMPYREAN IS, LIKE DANTE, SWATHED IN THE LIGHT OF GLORY. SUDDENLY SEES THE RIVER OF LIGHT WITH SPRINGTIME COLORS, LIVING SPARKS ARE MADE FIT TO SEE GOD. RISE FROM THE WATER AND TURN INTO FLOWERS, THEN PLUNGE BACK INTO THE STREAM. DANTE IS TOLD TO DRINK OF THE WATER WITH HIS EYES. [THESE THINGS ARE BUT SYMBOLS OF WHAT HE WILL BEHOLD.] THE RIVER REPRESENTS DIVINE GRACE, THE LIVING SPARKS ARE THE ANGELS, AND THE FLOWERS ARE THE SOULS TO WHOM THEY MINISTER. IT IS DANTE NOT THE SYMBOLS THAT ARE DEFICIENT. DANTE EAGERLY RECEIVES YET MORE GRACE WHEREBY HE MAY SEE BEYOND THESE SYMBOLS. HIS EAGERNESS IS A MEASURE OF HIS MERIT. THE RIVERS CONTOURS SWAYED AND SPREAD FORMING A CIRCLE. SUDDENLY DANTE SEES THE REALM'S TRUE APPEARANCE AND TRIUMPH. THE LUMEN GLORIAE OF GOD GIVES HIS CREATURES THE POWER TO BEHOLD HIM. MANIFESTED AS A VAST SPINNING CIRCLE, IT IS REFLECTED UPWARD FROM THE PRIMUM MOBILE ON WHICH IT STRIKES AND TO WHICH IT GIVES POWER AND VITALITY. IT IS THIS PERPETUAL REFLECTION OF THE LIGHT OF GOD WHICH CAST BACK INTO THE EYES OF THE BLESSED, MINISTERS TO THEIR PERPETUAL POWER OF LOOKING DIRECTLY INTO HIS LIGHT ITSELF. THE SAME CIRCLE FORMS THE YELLOW OF THE CELESTIAL ROSE. DANTE SEES TIER UPON TIER. DANTE IS NOW BEYOND THE LIMITS OF TIME AND SPACE AND ALL SECONDARY CAUSES. DANTE IS IN THE YELLOW OF THE CELESTIAL ROSE. DANTE LONGS TO SPEAK BUT FOLLOWS IN SILENCE AS BEATRICE SAYS YOU ARE GAZING ON THE SEAT OF EMPEROR HENRY VII (DIED 1313) NB STRAIGHTENED OUT ITALY. SHE TALKS OF THE RESISTANCE OFFERED BY THE PAPACY AND GUELF PARTY TO THE IMPERIAL AUTHORITY [POPE CLEMENT V ENCOURAGED AND THEN DISCOURAGED HENRY TO COME TO ROME TO BE CROWNED THIS WAS NEAR HENRY'S DEATH. CLEMENT V DIED IN 1314. BEATRICE NOW CONFIRMS THE PROPHESY ABOUT CLEMENT V BEING PUSHED ON TOP OF BONIFACE VIII DOWN THE HOLES OF THE SIMONITES IN HELL.

BEATRICE TELLS DANTE THAT THEY ARE NOW IN THE EMPYREAN. YOU WILL SEE THE ANGELS AND THE SOULS OF THE BLESSED MANIFESTED AS THOUGH IN THE BODY.

UPON SEEING BEATRICE'S FULL BEAUTY, DANTE SAYS: I MUST RELINQUISH ART AS EVERY ARTIST MUST AT SOME POINT WHEN PRESENTED WITH THE TRANSCENDENT.

DANTE LOOKS FROM THE POINT OF LIGHT BACK TO BEATRICE. BEATRICE BECAME INEXPRESSIBLE BEAUTY BEYOND KNOWLEDGE IN HER SMILE.

THE POINT OF GOD

JOHN YAU

IN THE VISIONARY TRADITION: THE ART OF PAUL LAFFOLEY

Paul Laffoley's diagrammatic paintings, drawings, and box constructions remain firmly outside any of art's currently fashionable classifications, and stand little if any chance of being assimilated into the mainstream. Like the work of sage-artists and visioanry utopians William Blake, Joseph Cornell, Buckminster Fuller, and, more recently, Alfred Jensen and Jess, Laffoley's demands to be taken on its own uncompromising terms. As with the work of all true visionaries, Laffoley's art has few stylistic affinities with his predecessors. Furthermore, in contrast to Jensen and Jess, Laffoley learned the technical aspects of his art without studying with painters such as Hans Hoffman and Clyfford Still. Instead, he chose to study architecture. To some degree, this choice explains why he is not painterly and why his painting surfaces do not have the tactile presence one encounters in the work of Jensen and Jess.

Laffoley was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1940. A Classics Major at Brown University, he graduated with a B.A. in 1962. After attending Harvard School of Design for a brief, unproductive period, he moved to New York and began working in the sculpture studio of the visionary architect, Frederick Kiesler. Laffoley deliberately sought out Kiesler because a relative, who was also involved in architecture, said to avoid him. In doing so, the relative unwittingly transformed Kiesler into a site where "forbidden knowledge" could be obtained. Throughout his career, Laffoley has made use of other such sites.

An original member of De Stijl and lifelong friend of Theodore van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian, Frederick Kiesler's theories and applications contributed to Laffoley's growing belief in an art that was visionary, ritualized, and wholistic. For Kiesler, innovation was an endless process involving not only the invention of new objects, techniques, and insights, but more importantly their application to new spheres of activity. Laffoley's work can be seen as evolving out of Kiesler's belief in history as an endless sequence of technological changes, and art as a thematic continuity which could be extended and expanded upon by both viewer and artist. Like Kiesler, Laffoley is committed to invention and application. His work results from intense investigations into the possible constellations formed by man, technology, and the natural environment. He believes ideas and something *seen* are synonymous.

In talking with the artist about his childhood, his relationship to Kiesler, and Buckminster Fuller, with whom he carried on a cor-

respondence, I was and am struck by the parallels between the way he and Robert Duncan understand their origins. As Duncan puts it in *The Truth & Life of Myth*: "The roots and depths of mature thought, its creative sources, lies in childhood or even 'childish' things I have not put away but taken as enduring realities of my being."[1] Laffoley, I believe, would agree with Duncan when he writes about the relationship between myth and folktale.

> Myth comes bringing to our minds the realm of great powers, ceremonies of primal Kings. Its persons are beyond our human condition, movers of the universe and initiators of first mysteries. The makers of myth have the grandeur of ancient time surrounding them, they are sages or mages more famous than kings. Homer, Hesiod, the priests at Sais and in Sumer, or the mythic Orpheus and Hermes who invented the lyre, god of thieves, liars and poets, or the shamans climbing the ladder of visions to make that trip to the other world and bring back the soul's story, these still belong to the orders of our lordly pretensions. Great myth has its home in great places, inspired from the Abyss or from Heaven, told from the tripod or altar, in temple or sacred grove. It may be seen as the remnant of once glorious but now perverted and heathen religion.[2]

After characterizing this "lordly" world, Duncan goes on to discuss the "humble" one of folktales:

> But folk and fairytale have their home in the gossip of old wives and little children, stories about the cooking-hearth and the nursery bedside. Whatever remnant there was in folktale of religion it must have fallen far even from heathen perversion to come so into contemptible ignorance of the people. Myth was populated by monsters, which men with higher minds might interpret in theosophies or philosophies, psychologies or etymologies to convey transcendent or deeper meanings. It might be primitive science or primitive history in which the record of great events and speculation was written. But the lowly folktale was populated irremediably by kitchen sluts and begging women and broom vendors and soldiers home from the wars and the like and their wish-phantasies and fear-delusions.[3]

Instead of maintaining the separation between high and low knowledge, Duncan sees himself as evolving out of the place where both are wedded together. This leads to the possibility that "the fictive proposition is also visionary reality."[4] Both Duncan's and Laffoley's unswerving commitment to this possibility forms the foundation of their work, as well as informs their interest in the occult, esoteric, and other orders of forbidden and discredited knowledge.

Laffoley has, for example, proposed the "UFO as the Basis of a World Meta-History":

> A world view, meta-history, or philosophy of history, by nature, demands a sense of the personal in relation to an interacting world in order for it to be an authentic projection of meaning upon the flow of events called history. To have a meta-history means to take a *conscious* perspective on the events of history. Since time and the totality of events that occur in it cannot be seen by the physical eye, they must be seen, if at all, by the mind's eye. A meta-history, therefore, is the product of the inner visualization process or imagination. Further, to take a perspective on history implies a position or set of positions from which to stand. This position must be of an ahistorical nature, that is, those experiences that humans are capable of but that are not normally considered of sustained significance to historical explanation. Such experiences would be the direct perception of nature, the mystical experience, fantasy, dreams, visions, voices, response to mythic structures, etc. It is by recognition, isolation, and utilization of these traditional visionary experiences that it is possible to construct a meta-history.[5]

After describing a series of personal events and revelations, among them childhood conversations with the family gardener who was a UFO contactee, seeing Robert Wise's film, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), and learning later that Frank Lloyd Wright's glass tubing (S.C. Johnson and Son, Racine, Wisconsin, 1949) had been translated into the pulsating interior of Klaatu's spacecraft, Laffoley goes on to conclude:

> The flying saucer, which has remained essentially outside of human history and yet always an available experience, implies the existence of a potentially united world civilization and an interconnected world history. All civilizations, at all times, have reported the existence of UFOs in some form, thus providing an apparently random link of events whose pattern anticipated the now emerging, total, but apparently random system of communication events around the world. The image of a spiritual technology that the flying saucer casts from an origin not of this world is preparing the people of the world for a true world-religion in the same way the river of good remembrance, the Eunoe, prepared Dante, at the end of the *Purgatorio*, for paradise:
>
> From Those most holy waters, born anew
> I came, like trees by change of calendars
> Renewed with new-sprung foliage through and through,
> Pure and prepared to leap up to the stars.[6]

Laffoley not only discovers a pattern within a random sequence of personal events, but he pushes their implications to the furthest limits his imagination will allow him to go. In the painting, *I, Robur Master of the World* (1968), the artist offers the viewer a highly detailed blueprint for a gigantic, wholistic motor, which has as its essential components the earth, moon, and geodesic spheres. The result: a flying saucer that is also a new Acropolis. For many of us, science fiction is nothing more than a modern

fairytale, a popular, lowly, and discredited form. Laffoley, however, points out that yesterday's science fiction is often tomorrow's science fact. If one knows how, knowledge and insight can be drawn from its currents. *I, Robur Master of the World* not only offers a plan for the future, but it also acknowledges and pays homage to Poe, Verne, Wells and Marcuse.

Laffoley's work confronts the viewer with blueprints of metaphysical proposals about the nature of reality. The paintings are large; the boxes, small and intimate. All, however, are so densely packed with information that they must be considered epic in scope. Typically, the work takes the form of diagrams that link images, facts, and theoretical propositions derived from the occult sciences, parapsychology, theosophy, history, literature, architecture, and various branches of the physical and theoretical sciences. Among the names and facts the viewer encounters are Wilhelm Reich, Goethe, Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin, Joseph Morrill Wells, Joacum of Fiora, Plato, Herman Melville, and Dr. Kahoutek, as well as black holes, tesseracts, Klein bottles, and Atlantis. Within Laffoley's diagrams everything becomes transformed into a tightly faceted lense-like structure focussing on man's destiny and the perceptual structures used to apprehend reality.

Astrakakiteraboat (1974) is a highly detailed plan for constructing a kite-boat to be used in an experiment in astral projection. In order to decide what kind of kite would be used, the artist experimented with different prototypes until he made one that could be vertically stabilized, thus allowing someone to stand or sit on a platform that is also part of the kite's design. Invention, as I pointed out earlier, must be connected to application. The design of the boat to be used to tug the kite was derived from the description of the 18th century whaling pirogue in *Moby Dick.* The painting also juxtaposes two similar shapes, a radio tube and an Egyptian sarcophagus, the implication being that the Egyptians designed their coffins as transmitters to project their Ka, or soul, into the world. In all of Laffoley's work, this kind of obsessive, highly associative logic is in operation every step of the way. Out of a wide range of information the artist weaves together a completely strange, wondrous fiction that speculates on the world of appearances.

Laffoley challenges our notions of what constitutes content in art, as well as our current definitions of abstract art. Like Alfred Jensen, he is an unexpected heir to Kandinsky and Mondrian, both of whom attempted to make a vision of utopia concrete. The relationship with Jensen runs deeper, of course. For each, science of the most abstract and theoretical kind is a major source feeding into the work. At the same time, Jensen and Laffoley evolve out of a tradition that many considered exhausted by the mid 1950's. Because the art world emphasizes the notion that a succession of styles and fashions are an integral part of an unfolding, historical sequence, it has regarded artists such as Alfred Jensen, Jess, and Paul Laf-

foley as eccentric, late modernists. And, in so doing, it has isolated them far more than their work warrants.

It is equally unfortunate that critics have invoked the term "visionary" so often. It should be reserved for the handful of solitary sojourners who have been both blessed and cursed with believing in the sanctity of the world. Visionaries not only attempt to discover the correspondences between the rhythms of the mortal body and those of the universe, but they also base all their actions on that knowledge. Once they establish links between the microcosm and the macrocosm, they shed the strictures of temporal time and recover the eternal – the timeless void from which the world sprang and to which it will return. Paul Laffoley is one of the few artists who actually deserves to be called a "visionary."

His art is one that repeatedly finds ways to name his desire, the overwhelming longing that is indifferent to ordinary life. It is an unrelenting desire for completion. Ultimately, it cannot be consoled. In turn, it does not console us. Having changed his life, Paul Laffoley asks us to do the same.

NOTES

1. Robert Duncan, *The Truth & Life of Myth: An Essay in Essential Autobiography* (Fremont, Michigan: The Sumac Press, 1968), p. 13.
2. Ibid., p. 36.
3. Ibid., p. 37.
4. Ibid., p. 39.
5. Brad Steiger (ed.), *Gods of Aquarius: UFOs and the Transformation of Man* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), p. 241.
6. Ibid., p. 242.

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I would like to thank Paul Laffoley for providing xeroxes of various articles both by and about him, as well as answering numerous questions.

FOUR POEMS

WILL

The boy had badly deformed legs, and there was a long, fresh,
surgical scar behind one knee.
The father, frankly wealthy, quite young, tanned, very board-room,
very well-made, self-made,
had just taken the boy's thin arm the way you would take the arm of
an attractive woman,
with firmness, a flourish of affection; he was smiling directly down
into the boy's face
but it was evident that this much companionability between them
wasn't usual, that the father,
whatever else his relation to the boy consisted of, didn't know that if
you held him that way
you would overbalance him, which, when the boy's crutches splayed
and he went down, crying *"Papa!"*
must have been what informed his voice with such shrill petulance,
such anguished accusation.

USOCA

At the United States Out of Central America rally at a run-down
community center in the Village,
the audience is so sparse that the Andean musicians who've come to
play for us are embarrassed
and except for the bass guitarist who has to give the introductions
explaining their songs
they all focus resolutely on their instruments, their gazes never rising,
even to one another.
Their music is vital, vigorous, sometimes wild, almost abandoned,
but informed always with nostalgia,
with exile's melancholy and its dark alarms, exacerbated surely by

how few and weak we are
but which we disregard, applauding at the end so heartfeltedly that they relent a bit,
releasing shy, exotic smiles which we gratefully pass between us like the precious doves of hope.

THE MODERN

Its skin tough and unpliable as scar, the pulp out of focus, weak, granular, powdery blank,
this tomato I'm eating—wolfing, stuffing down: I'm so hungry—is horrible and delicious.
Don't tell me, I know all about it, this travesty-sham; I know it was plucked green and unripe
then was locked in a chamber and gassed so it wouldn't rot till I bought it but I don't care:
I was so famished before I was sucking the sweat from my arm and now my tomato is glowing inside me.
I muscle the juice through my teeth and the seeds to the roof of my mouth and the hard,
scaly scab of where fruit met innocent stem and was torn free I hold on my tongue and savor,
a coin, a dot, the end of a sentence, the end of the long improbably utterance of the holy and human.

END OF DROUGHT

It is the opposite or so of the friendly gossip from upstairs who stops by every other evening.
It's the time she comes in once too often, or it's more exactly in the middle of her tete-a-tete,
when she grows tedious beyond belief, and you realize that unless an etiquette is violated

this will just go on forever, the way, forever, rain never comes, then comes, the luscious opposite,
the shock of early drops, the pavements and the rooftops drinking, then the scent, so heady with release
it's almost overwhelming, thick and vaginal, and then the earth, terrified that she'd bungled it,
that she'd dwelt too long upon the problems of the body and the mind, the ancient earth herself,
like someone finally touching pen to page, breathes her languid, aching suspiration of relief.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

WHAT WERE THE QUESTIONS?

There are only two sources for all of ancient Chinese poetry—two anthologies—and, like nearly everything Chinese, they form a neat pair: *yin* and *yang*, north and south, oral and literary, communal and personal, natural and supernatural, orthodox and heterodox.

The elder of the two is the *Shi jing—The Poetry Classic*, or what Pound called *The Book of Odes*. Reputedly compiled by Confucius himself, it is a collection of 305 songs from Northern China, composed between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C. They are anonymous and oral expressions of the workings of the community: planting songs, hunting songs, courtship and marriage songs, hymns, songs to accompany feasts and ceremonies, praises for the rulers. Considered a model artifact of the natural order of human society and the harmony between society and the universe, the *Shi jing* was, for millennia, the primary text of the Confucian canon. Aspiring bureaucrats were required to memorize it for the state examinations. It would, said Confucius, "fire the imagination, perfect one's social graces, straighten out misunderstandings, articulate complaints, instruct in service to one's father, instruct in service to one's lord, and teach the names of birds and beasts, flowers and trees." No literary, philosophical or political discourse was complete without reference to its authority—usually in the form of a sorely stretched allegorical interpretation.

The shadow side of the *Shi jing* is the *Chu ci—The Words of Chu*, or, as it is known in David Hawkes' classic scholarly translation, *The Songs of the South*. Chu was a small kingdom south of the lands of the earlier Shang and Zhou empires; today it is in central China. It rose in the sixth century B.C. and reached its peak in the fourth, when the earliest poems of the *Chu ci* were written. A first century A.D. historian, Ban Gu, has left us this description of the place:

> Watered by the Yangtze and the Han, Chu is a land of lakes and rivers, of well-forested mountains and of the wide lowlands of Jiangnan, where burning and flooding make the labors of plowing and hoeing superfluous. The people live on fish and rice. Hunting, fishing and wood-gathering are their principal activities. Because there is always enough to eat, they are a lazy and improvident folk, laying up no stores for the future, so confident are they that the supply of food and drink will always be replenished. They have no fears of cold or hunger; on the other hand, there are no rich households among them. They believe in the power of shamans and spirits and are much addicted to lewd religious rites.
>
> (trans. Hawkes)

A *triste tropique*: the Chu anthology is a book of shamanistic songs, supernatural journeys, personal confession, nostalgia, enigma, and nearly continual despair.

There are seventeen works—poems and poem-cycles—in the *Chu ci*, half of them written in the fourth and third centuries B.C., and half later imitations. According to tradition, the book was compiled by a librarian named Wang Yi in the second century A.D. Wang himself however—out of modesty or Borgesian humor—claimed that he had merely added a commentary and some (rather dull) poems of his own to the work edited by the librarian Liu Xiang two centuries before. Modern scholars, for their reasons, don't believe him. Hawkes, for one, believes that the first half—where all the interesting poems are—was collected by Liu An, Prince of Huai-nan in about 135 B.C., but that Wang Yi was responsible for the second half.

The best-known work in the anthology is the *Li sao* ("On Encountering Sorrow"), a long poem written by Qu Yuan, the first recognizable author in Chinese poetry. It is said that Qu, an honest minister who was banished on trumped-up charges, wrote the poem to protest the injustice of the world, and then drowned himself in the Mi-luo River [On the day of the Double Fifth festival in South China, people still throw special rice cakes into the rivers to feed his spirit. During the Sino-Japanese war of 1937-45, he was declared the Patriot Poet; after the revolution he became the People's Poet—neither is particularly apt.]

The *Li sao*, one of the great poems in the language—and one that apparently withstands all political weather—begins with the author's birth, continues through a life fraught with injustice and misunderstanding, and then takes off on a shamanistic flight to the other world as the poet searches fruitlessly for a mate among the goddesses and mythical princesses—marriage as allegory for successful employment in the government. In the end, at the peak of heaven, he sees his old home down below, realizes "There are no true men in the state: no one understands me," and decides to kill himself. It is the first in the endless succession of Chinese poems of autobiography, confession, exile, despair. And it is the quintessential *yin* poem: not only rich in flower and water imagery, but also the first poem to incorporate an "empty word" (a meaningless syllable) in the middle of its long lines. Such empty words, in one form or another, became standard practice in much of Chinese poetry: the void around which the poem is constructed, and through which the poem breathes—the void that defines the relationship between things, and between the things and the poet. [Sometimes these empty words are translated as "oh" or "ah," but this is emotional and misleading; most of the time they are simply ignored.]

Also of interest in the anthology is the "Nine Songs" (typical of the book, there are actually eleven). This appears to be a court masque, written for performance with costume, dance, and orchestra, and may also

be the work of Qu Yuan. Presumably based on local folk practices, it deals with shamanistic flights and invocations of the gods. Although the texts are now difficult to understand—it is often unclear whether the poet, the shaman or the god is speaking—the mood is nostalgic, erotic, and relentlessly mournful. The shamans woo the gods and goddesses with tears and lamentation, much like Troubadour lovers. Often the god does not appear; often the meeting is brief. And even those who do achieve ecstatic union with the gods must, too soon, return to the dreariness of the mortal world.

Strangest of all the *Chu ci* texts is the *Tian wen*, a series of 172 questions without answers in 186 lines. Its title has never been explained: *tian* means "heaven," *wen* means "question" (verb or noun). *Tian wen*, then, could be "Heaven's Questions," "Heaven Asks," "Questions About Heaven." Wang Yi thought it meant "Questions to Heaven." Hawkes translates it as "Heavenly Questions," and its most recent translator, Stephen Field, has proposed "Investigation of the Heavens."

The questions begin with the creation of the universe:

> Of the beginning of old,
> Who spoke the tale?
>
> When above and below were not yet formed,
> Who was there to question?
>
> When dark and bright were obscured,
> Who could distinguish?*

move on to astronomy:

> The sun and moon are how coupled?
> How are the patterned stars ranged?

physics:

> Emerge by the boiling canyon,
> Arrive at the vale of night.
>
> From light until dark
> Is a pass of how many miles?

geography:

> How were the Nine Lands blocked?
> How did the rivers clog?

*The translation cited throughout is by Stephen Field, from his *Tian Wen: A Chinese Book of Origins* (New Directions, 1986). Readers should also consult the more prosaic version by David Hawkes, in his revised version of *The Songs of the South* (Penguin, 1985).

Their eastward flow never fills the sea.
Who knows why?

marvels of the earth:

Where is the stone forest?
What beast can speak?

Where roams the Horned Dragon,
Bearing on its back the bear?

mythology:

White serpent in a swirling mist,
Why does it hover about the hall?

From whence came the auspicious pill
That could not well be hidden?

Heaven's Longbow, crosswise in the sky,
When the sun retreated, died.

Why did the Great Bird call,
And thereby lose its life?

and on to legendary heroes and historical kings and princes—many of them Shang dynasty figures whose names were unknown from the time the anthology was compiled in the Han until the recent archaeological discoveries—a catalog of conspiracies, palace revolts, unjust banishments, adultery, madness and murder:

Who would King You have put to death
Had he not received Bao Si?

Heaven's mandate is not assured.
Who is punished, who succored?

Nine times Qi Huan convened the Dukes.
His life was smothered nonetheless.

That stalwart King Chou of Shang,
who led him into delusion?

* * *

The sages were of equal virtue,
why were their outcomes so diverse?

Mei Bo was sliced and pickled,
While Ji Zi feigned insanity.

Like all the poems in the *Chu ci*, the questions concerning worldly affairs deal with the decadence and the moral corruption of the times. Amidst the historical, there is this allegorical question:

> Mean creatures are the bees and ants.
> Why is their power pervasive?

Nearly everything about the *Tian wen* is a mystery. Many of the questions are incomprehensible. With the exception of a litany of philosophical questions in the *Zhuangzi*, there is nothing similar in Chinese literature. It was composed in an archaic language, unlike the other poems in the *Chu ci*. It was originally written, like all ancient Chinese books, on slips of bamboo—one line per slip—tied together by string. The string rotted and the lines were shuffled. Its authorship is unknown. Tradition attributes its composition to (again) Qu Yuan, who, seeking refuge in the Chu ancestral temples, wrote the questions as captions for the murals he found on the walls. But this is highly unlikely: there would have had to have been hundreds of murals; and why caption them with questions, or caption them at all? Most vexing to Chinese scholars is the function of the text. What was the "Heavenly Questions" for?

It is obvious what it is not. It is not an examination for students or initiates: some of the answers would be known to the questioner, and some (particularly the cosmological ones) would not. Some of the questions are answered by the following question, and some appear to be riddles or conundrums based on certain information rather than questions about it. It is not a philosophical inquiry, along the lines of the *Zhuangzi* or parts of the *Vedas*: many of the questions are purely historical or scientific, and seem to require short factual answers.

David Hawkes believes it started out as an "ancient, priestly riddle-text (a sort of catechism to be used for mnemonic purposes) which was rewritten and greatly enlarged by a secular poet," whom Hawks thinks was Qu Yuan. (By "priestly" he means shamanistic, and by "catechism" a truncated one—one without answers.) Stephen Field thinks it was collectively composed by court academicians, "as a debate exercise, created to give the popular and prominent dialecticians a tool for honing their convoluted responses." The great Sinologist Burton Watson has come up with the oddest explanation of all, that the questions are in fact "a series of storytellers' topics":

> Thus, for example, if the storyteller began by quoting the passage . . . that reads: "When Chien Ti was in the tower, how did K'u favor her?" his listeners would know that they were about to hear the tale of the ancestress of the Shang dynasty who, shut up in a tower, became pregnant by swallowing a bird's egg sent to her by the hero K'u. Or again, if the storyteller announced: "Lord Millet was the first-born. How did God favor him?" they would settle back to listen to the saga of . . . Lord Millet, the heroic ancestor of the royal family of Chou.

He meets the obvious objection with:

> How the storytellers' "table of topics" came to be compiled in verse form, I do not know, though it seems quite plausible that somewhere along the line an enterprising professional would have delighted in summing up the vast scope of his lore in elegant literary form.

Any of these theories may be correct, or partially correct, but it is also quite possible that the *Tian wen* has no "function" at all—that is, that the questions were composed as, and intended to be, a poem.

Disregarding the later shuffling and possible amendments, I'd like to assume the text has an author, and that the author is Qu Yuan, creator of the *Li sao* and the "Nine Songs." (It could, of course, be a contemporary or later imitator. There used to be a theory that Shakespeare's plays were not written by William Shakespeare, but by another man of the same name.)

Two things about Qu Yuan: First, he is an anti-Confucianist. As the author of the *Li sao*, he has rejected the traditional wisdom that the Mandate of Heaven is bestowed on the good and withdrawn from the evil; his heaven is inscrutable. He has rejected the *Shi jing* notion of the poem as a product of the *vox populi* to write a long poem of his personal sorrow. And he is involved with shamans. Second, he is, as the author of the "Nine Songs," what is now called an ethnopoet: an adapter of archaic religious or indigenous material for a literary audience. (Indeed, the "Nine Songs," with its probable costumes, orchestra, and dances, is reminiscent of the Milhaud-Léger-Cendrars 1923 African spectacle *La Création du monde.*) It is a procedure he would have partially learned from the *Shi jing*, whose songs were regularized and polished to an unknown extent at the time they were collected and written down.

Hawkes has written that "the 'Heavenly Questions' are questions about the parts and motions of Heaven, about the world which it helped produce, and about the various destinies which it dispenses to mortal men." I take this as the poem's argument, the poet's intent. Cheated by heaven, he seeks to understand it by recreating it: a "book of origins," in Field's phrase, or what Pound called "a poem with history." As a book of origins, it is a return—I would say a conscious return—to the origins of lyric poetry: rhythm and taboo.

The poem is written in lines of four characters, each a stressed monosyllable, like most of the poems in the *Shi jing* (which would have been, for Qu Yuan, a primary text of ancient wisdom). This regular, monotonous beat takes us to one of the sources of the lyric: the work song, the lullaby, the dance. Mircea Eliade finds an origin for lyric poetry in the shaman's "pre-ecstatic euphoria"—that is, the chanting and drumming before the shaman takes off to the other world. In all cases, it is assumed that steady physical repetition ultimately flowers into melody and then words.

[Interestingly, the earliest surviving piece of Chinese literary criticism, the "Great Preface" to the *Shi jing*, anonymously written sometime between the fifth century B.C. and the first A.D., has a reverse origin myth for poetry: the words come first. "Poetry is the forward movement of the activities of the mind." (Projective verse!) "When the emotions within one are stimulated into activity, they assume verbal forms. The verbal forms assumed sometimes do not give full expression to the emotions, one has then to have recourse to heaving and sighing. When even heaving and sighing do not give proper vent to the emotions, one turns to chanting and singing. And when even singing and chanting prove unsatisfying, one begins, unwittingly, to gesture and dance with one's entire physical frame." (trans. Siu-kit Wong)]

Perhaps even more important to the evolution of lyric poetry is the fact that the shaman is chanting in a secret language. Metaphor is born from taboo: that which cannot be named must be named in another way. And those who know and can speak the new names have acquired the power of the unnameable. This new magical language invariably takes the form of metrically organized, concentrated speech: the formula. Furthermore, it is nearly always considered to be the language of the lost paradise or of the other world: the language of the gods, the language from the time when men spoke directly with the birds and animals, the language of the kingdom of death.

Arcana is the langauge of the archaic. It consists of metaphors without referents, weird conjunctions, and meaningless sounds. Once it was spoken in paradise; now, in historical time, it has become incomprehensible to all except a few. It is an image, like the crippled dancer, of the origin: the time when all was one, before things sorted out and the cripple could no longer dance. [In this century, apocalyptically, arcana is the language of the future, the end of time. Joyceans used to say that *Finnegans Wake* would someday be as easy to read as a detective novel; recently the same claims have been advanced on behalf of the "Language" poets.]

The *Tian wen* is—deliberately, I think—written in the archaic, arcane speech, and overlaid with acronyms, conundrums and riddles (secular and witty forms of the sacred arcane that—full circle—were often resacralized by religious academics). Whether it is an entirely original composition or an adaptation or "found" poem of shamanistic formulae, with some elaborations, will remain unknown. But what matters is that, as an image of the universe, it was written or compiled or collaged in this way.

Why then, a poem of questions without answers? The linguist Henry Hiz writes that "the two main views of language, that it describes the world, and that it expresses thought, are not directly applicable to questions." A question is neither true nor false; it is a "suspended thought." The "meaning" of a question, according to Hiz and other linguists, is all its possible answers—or all its true answers.

A question is the only complete grammatical structure that cannot exist by itself—it must always take us somewhere else, to another sentence or to an unspoken (unspeakable) unknown. It is the piece of ordinary speech closest to a line of poetry. Questions, like poems, like sacred formulae, are articulations of desire. The sacred formula: a concentration of power in order to possess what one does not have, become what one is not. The question: to reach the answer, or the unanswerable. Poetry: to find out, or, in Octavio Paz' phrase, "to find the way out."

Scholars have claimed that Qu Yuan could not be the author of the *Tian wen*, because the poem does not contain the *yin* empty words of the *Li sao*. This is unconvincing: a question contains its own void—it is the preeminent *yin* utterance, always unfinished, always "before completion." And nothing could be more anti-Confucian than a question without an answer, for Confucianism, above all, provides answers for everything.

The question, then, may be the perfect vehicle for a poem of origins. It is inherently nostalgic. A question is articulated longing, and there is, finally, only the longing for paradise and its particulars. At the beginning of written poetry, in the earliest surviving texts, there is always the story of the origin, and lamentation for the present decay. In Chinese, the *Li sao* and *Tian wen*. In English, that great poem "The Ruin":

> Snapped rooftrees, towers fallen,
> the work of the Giants, the stonesmiths,
> mouldereth.
> Rime scoureth gatetowers
> rime on mortar.
>
> Shattered the showershield, roofs ruined,
> age under-ate them.
> And the wielders & wrights?
> Earthgrip holds them—gone, long gone,
> fast in gravesgrasp while fifty fathers
> and sons have passed.

A poem that itself ends in ruins:

> Stood stone houses; wide streams welled
> hot from source, and a wall all caught
> in its bright bosom, that the baths were
> hot at hall's hearth; that was fitting . . .
> . . . . . .
> Thence hot streams, loosed, ran over hoar stone
> unto the ring-tank . . .
> . . . It is a kingly thing
> . . . city . . .
>
> (trans. Michael Alexander)

A question is a quest. A quest that begins with what might have been the first question ever spoken—and the one most difficult to answer—"Who's there?" It tracks through the rubble of the present in search of the origins, the explanations. In the *Li sao*, Qu Yuan goes to heaven to understand earth; in the *Tian wen* he wanders with seeming aimlessness through human history to understand heaven.

China has never had an epic poem; the *Tian wen* is its first, and best, "poem with history." And *historiai*, what Herodotus called his book about the Persian Wars, means "a learning or knowing by inquiry." The Greek verb *historein* means "to ask questions."

History, in the *Tian wen*, is an endless reiteration of moral corruption and legal crime. It is possible to imagine Qu Yuan as Job: that his questions are rhetorical, not meant to seek answers, but only to bewail the injustice of heaven. I'd prefer to think of him as Perceval or one of the heroes of countless fairy tales: those who discover that asking the question is not only an act of personal redemption, but a way to save the state.

[1986]

Postscript

There is a *yin* and *yang* of poetry: poems that ask questions and those that claim to have the answers. Thinking about the *Tian wen*, I find it hardly a coincidence that the two great writers of questions in 20th century American poetry were both women: H.D., particularly in her late poetry of nostalgia, elegy and recalled passion:

> He went away, Goth, the German, *Germain*,
> degrees, days, hours, minutes,
>
> how many? he left the flowers, August the 3rd,
> this is October 17th and they say,
>
> he comes back in three days—will he?
> who will come back? a wandering flame,
>
> a name, Goth, Gott, *Dieu admirable*, or another?
> what Sun will rise, what darkness will unclose?
>
> what spark, diastole, systole, compel, repel?
> what counter-appeal contract the heart?
>
> or not, what mystery? shall the winter-branch
> be broken, fuel for another? or shall the branch,

prouder than spring, lordlier than summer,
strike deeper and grow higher to disclose

the last enchantment,
the white winter-rose?

And Gertrude Stein, dynamiter of syntactical authority—whose last words were, reputedly, "What is the question?":

> Why is a pale white not paler than blue, why is a connection made by a stove, why is the example which is mentioned not shown to be the same, why is there no adjustment between the place and the separate attention. Why is there a choice in gamboling. Why is there no necessary dull stable, why is there a single piece of any color, why is there that sensible silence. Why is there the resistance in a mixture, why is there no poster, why is there that in the window, why is there no suggester, why is there no window, why is there no oyster closer. Why is there a circular diminisher, why is there a bather, why is there no scraper, why is there a dinner, why is there a bell-ringer, why is there a duster, why is there a section of a similar resemblance, why is there that scissor.
>
> South, south which is a wind is not rain, does silence choke speech or does it not.

AT AN OUTDOOR CAFE

Her disappearance wasn't noted
until read about in the Romances.
You talk of her and the walls turn
to cloud. What looks in is not ours,
belongs beyond our eyes in the casket
of moonlight. Suddenly, there is no way
out. What crouches beneath the porcelain
cup? We are at vigil, yet stupidly ignore
the dance of bees.

DEDOUBLER 1

He turns to the mirror, he
turns in the mirror
where the waiting woman waits
leaving him floating
above himself, the urge
like a black wish come white,
leaves him floating above the world
legs spread for himself.

SORROW

Sorrow is the tear I fall in,
the eye the ocean darkens
larger than the charts avow.

Seed of all fountains, of
water's need,
of nerve and line, moon's
blood in rhyme.
Sherry in a crystal glass
on the table of what has passed.

Seed that bears its growth in the limitless
weight of all direction, voice
that fails to return once thrown,
falls from time's claw to this earth's
thirst, is in my palm a silver ring,
circle of hunger, circle of concentric loss.

METAPHOR

As if a flower

as if a woman flowered again
and again in rain, as if crimson startled
the blue sky, into the water fell a rose

Out of the water rose the adumbration of voice
on a frail stem

Far off in the forest he is chopping wood,
he is splitting being. He splits
it in two and
two again. Crisp slivers of orange
curl to the duff as he carves petals.

He feels the voice brush his cheek
like rain and fill his hands and he is blind.
He can feel the water swell. The flower
he has carved is torn from him.
He is whole in his tears.

MEDITATION

I was drinking impatience again this suggestive
evening, or perhaps impulse, the link of material
to phenomenal mind. The window waded along shores
of a marsh where two moose fed. We had a child and named
her Passage, and trains flecked with faces
shuddered into the mired night. Yet ahead of it all
I saw the steamy yellow room, smoke and music burnished
by the blind light. The distance from caprice
to anxiety was optional. I think it was the Messiaen,
or the way you moved pulling yellow across shadow,
provocation always lurking like another breath.
And outside, the path curves into loss
and we call it origin. And outside it is snowing.

PIECES O' SIX—XXII

Wait on the sidelines and wonder why no message was considered such a virtue. The mind wanders and one calls it the heart. The heart beats and language explodes in polysemy. The catch is Ez as progressive *malgré lui.* His anti-Judaism twinned Marx's, but the latter's was lifelong. Carbuncular scatologist became avuncular myth. Don't call that genocide a "holocaust": a holocaust is a *voluntary* offering. Both uncles helped. Helping comes from the heart. The heart has reasons the reason can know all too well. If the first words are expunged, how can they be recalled? To recall a writing do we need a note? When ink flows too freely may be worse than when it won't. When it won't, one has to use another pen (if one can't fill or clean the first one). When too much comes out, one thinks the flow will ebb. This happens far above the curling clouds. A napkin absorbs the words that might have been here. The words would have been above the clouds. There will be blots below. Wherever the words would have been, the mind might also. The mind is here above the curling clouds. The mind is here beneath the curling clouds. It curls around itself and through its objects. It holds before itself the time before, when it was higher and elsewhere. The clouds were below and the pressure of the air affected the pen and thence the writing. Those who write with a pencil are affected differently. The point often must be renewed, but there are no blots. They are unbothered by graphite's smudgeableness. They are prompt copiers. Their writings do not wait for years uncopied in drawers or notebooks. Those who write with pens more clearly or incessantly hear "time's wingèd chariot hurrying near." Yet some dawdle or procrastinate. They put off copying indefinitely. Why don't they write on typewriters or computer terminals, printing the words out at once? They feel connected strongly, maybe, with the ancient ways—bound to carry them on. They are ill at ease on keys. Their writing, they must feel, must be first of all *writing.* The curse of the cursive is upon them. They're distracted by the clack of keys, even the muted click of an electronic keyboard. Or perhaps the dispersal of the letters over the keyboard is the trouble. From a pencil or pen they flow from a single point. No letter is more peripheral than another. Every stroke is central. Even lines connecting letters into words. Even those that cross words out or caret them in. Their manuscripts resemble action painters' canvases. Each stage of the way has left its mark. The patient and curious may trace the path of their making. Some, of course, discard the manuscript as dross once a fair typescript's been achieved. They

need it no more than an architect needs the scaffolding once a building's been completed. The initial impulses flowed from the instrument's tip that responded immediately to their fingers' mediating movements just above it. But after they'd been formalized in type, their traces were no more needed than the creases in sheets left by copulating lovers are needed nine months after. But others need to retrace their steps or have others retrace them later. Long after a work is in print, they keep its first draft in their files. Years after the deed, the need for the seed. Mere pardonable cupidity motivates others. They know their scrawls may mean money once they're known. They envision collectors and colleges thronging their dotage. They hope to cushion their decline with discarded cellulose, water and fire their future's foes. Others trust no copy, even their own. Some have found themselves wise not to. Long after a work was in print, a look at a manuscript has revealed a grievous error. When the work was reprinted, the error was corrected. But wasn't the error perceptible in print? Not necessarily. The writer who looks at the book is other than the one who indited the draft. Hindsight may even reveal that some early revisions were mistakes. Only first drafts with unobliterated crossed-out words are of use here. The writer ashamed of primal gaucheries may just as well burn manuscripts. Can remuneration soothe humiliation? Well, sometimes. But only if it comes in time. Those files may only benefit revealers of nasty secrets and traffickers in old paper long after the writer's demise. But the writer who long after realizes second thoughts were inferior to first can only be brought to that realization by viewing that yellowing paper. At that remove whose memory's good enough? And the present self may well be unable to *invent* the more felicitous phrase or wiser thought the earlier self had come to. Often writers who exaggerate the unity of the self through time spoil their older compositions by later revision. What the present self scorns may be the only phrase or thought truly congruous with the rest of that earlier work. Writing revised long after its composition is a temporal collage, a committee work. Its writer's a parent who grants offspring no autonomy. But isn't turning back to authorize an earlier version – having second thoughts about second thoughts – just as much a later self's interference with an earlier's decision? Of course. But at least an earlier self's consulted – one still earlier than the first reviser. One doesn't have to be a partisan of "first thought best thought" to grant that the earlier impulse may have been the clearer, the revision dictated by inferior considerations less relevant to the matter at hand than to extraneously imposed proprieties, perhaps, or internally generated post hoc idealizations. Often a writer changes her mind for good reason, but sometimes reason, as manifested after the fact, is the last guide the writer should follow. Conscious technique is too easily decried, but not all technique is conscious. Some of its greatest coups are accomplished by the peripheral mind. When that central searchlight we call consciousness turns itself upon such an

achievement, it can find itself confounded, the manifestation foreign. If not overcome by proper wonder, it may reject the unexpected result of what vainly it tries to appropriate as its own action. What it cannot assimilate it extrudes. Reason enough it can find to oust the intruder. All too easy to find a more assimilable substitute. Just because it is another self, the viewer from decades hence may more easily see that what seemed better reason at the time of the revision was merely interference by a vanity-driven centrality. Belatedly it may side with the earlier, better impulse of a former self, since neither the earlier nor the later former self, neither the source of the better nor that of the worse, is identical with its present constitution, no matter how closely akin. But letting a present self utterly overwhelm a former one, as may happen when an early work is later drastically revised to accord with the later self's predilections, can sometimes amount to vandalism demanding the restorative hand of an astute posthumous editor (or in a happier case, effective persuasion by an antemortal one). A writer must respect the autonomy of both former selves and their offspring. This does not mean of course *absolute* noninterference. Sometimes a later self, just because of its distance, can better see what an earlier one was up to. By a kind of role-playing it can put itself in the former self's place and condition and not only change back an ill-advised revision but even put something in place that was never in the original but *would* have been, had not some inner or outer influence blinded or deadened the former self at that point in the course of its writing. Like a good "creative writing" teacher it can divine what that earlier self would have done if whatever hindrance or ignorance prevented it had not. But that's a tricky maneuver only to be executed when an eye-widening flash of certainty supervenes to overcome the wise scruple that usually counsels forbearance. Without such a flash the rule of thumb's "let well enough alone." When "well enough" seems to demand improvement, don't spoil an old work by tinkering too much. Write a new one.

3 May 1985-27 July 1985
New York and in the air

MIRCEA ELIADE (1907-1986)

His earliest memory was crawling in the forest, having wandered away from his mother, and suddenly coming face to face with a resplendent blue lizard.

His earliest story, written as a child, began: "I met God at the end of a path. He had pulled a branch off a hazel tree and was trying to make a switch of it. 'You wouldn't have a penknife, by any chance?' he asked me."

He trained himself to sleep only four hours a night. He learned Italian, French, Portuguese, English, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Persian, Russian, Sanskrit, Bengali. As a teenager he published two novels and hundreds of shorter pieces: stories, accounts of his extensive walking trips through the countryside, literary criticism, essays on entomology, alchemy, Orientalism, religion.

At 21 he went to India for three years. He studied Sanskrit twelve hours a day, had a doomed love affair (recounted in his novel *Bengali Nights*), and ended up as a yogi in a cave above Rishikesh. That conjunction—scholarship, sensuality, sacrality—describes his life.

By 30 he had written seventeen books in Rumanian: best-selling novels, collections of stories and essays, books on India, alchemy, oceanography, Babylonian cosmography. He had translated two volumes of T.E. Lawrence, and written his first book on Yoga in French. (A year later, his first book written in English.)

Because of the great books on Yoga and shamanism, and *Patterns in Comparative Religion, The Myth of the Eternal Return, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, The Forge and the Crucible, The Quest, The Sacred and the Profane, The Two and the One, Images and Symbols, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries,* the anthology *From Primitives to Zen,* the three-volume *A History of Religious Ideas,* he was (and is) the preeminent guide and encyclopedia to the manifestations of the ancient mysteries—for the second half of the century, our Frazer. "We are 'condemned,' " he wrote, "to learn and to reawaken to the life of the spirit through books."

And yet he considered his work as an historian of religion as ancillary to his fiction. His masterpiece, he thought, was the long novel *The Forbidden Forest.**

*I had tried to read it, and gave up after a hundred pages. Years later, reading his journals,

His friends were Bachelard, Jung, Bataille, Breton, Ionesco, Ortega y Gasset, Dumézil, Cioran. His death elicited only a few paragraphs in our "newspaper of record."

Reading that news I thought, not inexplicably, of the mass animal sacrifices I had attended a few years ago in a valley outside of Kathmandu. Hundreds of the faithful snaked in a single file over the hills: the men leading male kids on a tether; the women with roosters, plates heaped with yellow and red flowers, incense, and clarified butter; the poorest among them holding a single egg dipped in blood. At the bottom of the ravine was an altar open on four sides, canopied by the hoods of four enormous gilt cobras. There a spring came out of the ground, and there too was the object of veneration: Kali, goddess of death and destruction, grinning, squatting on a prostrate corpse, with her legs spread and a skull cup between her thighs. One by one the priests decapitated the animals, splattered the blood on the image of the goddess, and carried the carcasses to the blood-red stream to be washed and cooked in huge simmering pots, the meat fed to the pilgrims.

As described thus far, it was a scene that the modern, urban connoisseur of the archaic has learned how to read. Birth and death and rebirth, cosmic time: Mother Earth (with her spring and open altar) turning into Mother Death (giving birth to a skull, demanding the blood of males) and back to Mother Earth again (the meat of the sacrifice nourishing the faithful). But what struck me most about the rite was its utter ordinariness. Here were not only peasants in traditional dress, but also men in polyester suits. Teenagers carried ghetto-blasters, families were having boisterous picnics, small groups of men played cards. The mood was, above all, that of a Sunday outing.

The modern invention of the archaic has projected an aura of drama and solemnity onto traditional religious practice—a kind of psychological Gothic cathedral for the forest where the rites are enacted and the myths told. And when the ghetto-blasters start appearing at the animal sacrifice, it is seen as a dilution of the past, a weakening of the faith.

Yet one essential quality of the archaic is precisely its lack of distinction between sacred and profane—its habitual daily commerce between the gods and men. It is a sign of religious decadence when that exchange is relegated to a single hour of the week in a separate (and silent) house.

Eliade wrote "I arrived at cosmic sacralities by reflecting on the daily experiences of Rumanian or Bengali peasants." Never much of a theoretician, his subject was the "concrete spiritual life as it takes place in

I came across this passage: "*Forêt Interdit*. Why do so many readers stop, discouraged, after a hundred pages?" If only they would realize that those pages are deliberately "confused, wordy, and awkward"—a "camouflage" for what is to come. Past those pages, "any intelligent reader would be captivated, obsessed."

culture" – the stuff of the sacred. He was a man who read everything and remembered everything: any thing reminded him of everything else. For Eliade, to find God one could begin anywhere. He was, at heart, a Hindu – and often could barely disguise his impatience with the exclusionary policies of the three monotheisms. And he was – in his histories of religion perhaps more than in his fiction – a poet: one of the century's great celebrants of the ideas in things.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

Jed Rasula and I have carried on an immensely useful correspondence, off and on, for eight years. In order to keep the letters flowing with something like the spontaneity of a conversation, we dispense with many of the niceties of literacy. The original of this letter was cleaned up somewhat and the comments in square brackets added on July 13, 1986.

D.B.

77 Glendale Avenue Albany, NY 12208 6-10-86

Dear Jed,

. . . Its expressive power is tremendous but there is little in classic bebop which cannot be assimilated to prior musical practice. [In the broadest sense, it was still concerned with ratios of tone and time, harmonies, etc.] Most startling probably is bop phrasing in the solos of Parker and everyone who learned from him and the way the time on the high-hat becomes an almost constant and undifferentiated vibration, more drone than definitive rhythm. The figures played on the rest of the drum set are not "rhythmic" at all, if that means "repetitive." They are markings of "blind intervals," as Coolidge uses it,

> No, nothing but what comes from the inside this time.
> Blind intervals. [*Crystal Text*, p. 7]

If you listen to Kenny Clarke or Max Roach or Philly Joe Jones or Art Blakey, and hear the blind intervals, the silences they open have to be filled. [I wish someone, with the right technical equipment, would write a good study of bop drummers; the soloists are exciting, but I have the suspicion that it was the drummers who pushed it over the edge.] These yawning gaps which open, not in "time" but in the "world," are scary, and it is hard to attend to them for long. They could not be filled with phrases; it was necessary more and more to fill up the blanks with "sheets of sound." *Free Jazz*, *Om*, and Albert Ayler's *Prophesy* HAD to come to fill in the

space. The only thing that could manifest the silence was *all* sound. It was a phase shift, between 1954, or 1939, and—say—1964. In Ayler's recordings toward the end of that time, music moved all the way from tone, rhythm, harmony to SOUND. . . .

[Jed noted in his reply that this is wrong, and it is at least too simple and wrong in emphasis; I was trying to set up the discussion of information theory which follows. He mentioned Monk's compositions: "silence like a tidepool . . . everytime you passed by you'd spot something else in there you hadn't noticed the last time. That's why all those Monk tunes are so enduring & provided such a stable repertoire for him. They're set up in such a way that they allow for the fact that the entire ocean is out there sloshing in on the little hollow in the rock where life-forms spawn. It changes every day; Monk's tunes are the bedrock of the 50's transfiguration because they're wholly written to change every day, as jazz itself has been the tradition of, all along. That you could write 'chord' out of 'chord changes' and just have 'the changes,' & if you said 'the changes' long enough you'd really end up with just that: authentic changes."

Yes. And also in Miles Davis in those recordings in the early and middle fifties, Mingus, the first decade of the Jazz Messengers. "Sheets of sound" itself is an inaccurate characterization of Coltrane's work, too typical of the sloppy thinking in the jazz press and too easy to pick up. Listen, for example, to "Vigil."

The point that I do not make clearly enough is the mutual requirement of blind intervals and "sheets of sound," which obstruct the thing they try to express. When you try to fill them up, the blind intervals only become more numerous: when you put a tone in a blind interval, it divides and makes *two* blind intervals, etc.]

In the history of symbol systems beginning with the caves, I would guess, expression is *rule-governed.* For the first time, about 1959, there was a complex expressive medium which escaped that restriction [unless one thinks here of the Abstract Expressionist painters, who are likewise relevant to the discussion of Coolidge]. Ornette Coleman said, "When I realized it was possible to make mistakes in a free jazz session, I knew I was on to something." That is, it is possible to communicate without rules or, in a term Jack Clarke takes from Novalis, "provisorily determined boundaries" [in *From Feathers to Iron,* forthcoming, Tombouctou Press, a book of immense importance to this discussion, and the more general orientation of the present].

The trouble is that language [i.e. rule-governed language] is only statistically reliable, and the "slippage" in language which the post-structuralists have noted is completely describable and controllable. The absoluteness of language is not metaphysical but statistical, and the social engineer can use a statistically reliable medium to control a population, just as electrical engineers use statistically reliable information to make

computer chips. We are not under the tyranny of the signified but the tyranny of statistical laws which account for "slippage" and other forms of deviance [i.e. freedom]. If dice are thrown fast enough we will not see a random sequence but eleven solid, discrete, and reliable entities. In fact, what one finds in Coolidge is non-statistical intuition, which according to Whitehead is God working concretely in the world, but, as he notes, the emotion is *not* religious. . . . but immediate, active.

Did you ever get Dretske's *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*? [MIT Press, 1981. Of course, information theory is hardly news. Olson quotes Norbert Wiener's definition of information in "The Kingfishers," and it became a fad in the fifties and sixties, but it came to as little as most intellectual fads do.] He is the first person to have done a responsible job with information theory, because he does not confuse information and meaning, [a mistake which vitiated the attempts in the fifties to use the theory outside of narrow technical applications]. Information is meaningless in itself, requires a semantic. Actually as prologue to this epoch, he has it: IN THE BEGINNING WAS INFORMATION, THE WORD CAME LATER.

He says, ". . . one is free to think about information (though not meaning) as an objective commodity, something whose generation, transmission, and reception do not require or in any way presuppose interpretive processes. One is therefore given a framework for understanding how meaning can evolve."

"Information" is the average number of bits that it takes eliminate the uncertainty in a situation: e.g. it takes 3 bits of information to choose one person from a group of 8 (i.e. three flips of a coin), redundancy would be the determination of each round by a best 2 or three. That quantity, that's all. For example – to use one of Dretske's examples. A boss requires one of eight employees to do a nasty job, but leaves it up to them to decide, asking only that they notify him who has been chosen. They divide into two groups of four and toss a coin, into two groups of two, and the remaining two flip to decide the loser. The name is written on a piece of paper and delivered to the boss. If we intercept the communication, we get reliable information, but we do not know what it means, because we do not have a semantic for it. Suppose, however, the office boy misplaces the note. He had noticed that it had one of the eight employees' names on it, but he can't remember which one, so he makes a guess, which happens to be right, and delivers it to the boss. The boss gets *no* information but he gets the right meaning.

In a lot of reading situations, I suspect that there is meaning but no information – the channel is swamped by semantics. Consider: Helen Vendler reads Wallace Stevens. [Actually, Vendler has become the code in *Sulfur* for the academic establishment, which is unfair. She excludes most of the poets whom I consider important from her anthology, for

example, for good reasons; hers is an *aesthetic* and, I suspect, a moral stand. Most academic readers are merely ignorant]. The text itself is solipsistic: the channel carries information about the poetic application of semantic rules to the information which Stevens has received. The reading situation is also solipsistic: Vendler reads the poet, applying the semantic rules by which she reads poetry. The result is that she gets a meaning glow [the warmth of heart which follows having successfully applied one's semantic] and the satisfaction of poetry. In truth, she has participated in a purely solipsistic act of rule-application to a text which makes itself available to rules. It appears that all rules are agreeable to one another: if a text is regulated in itself, any rules will interpret it.

But Dretske's notion about the evolution of meaning is only half right at best, because he does not know, as Coolidge does, that the Way gets in the way. . . . Information flows with Heraclitean rapids, but MEANING OBSTRUCTS ITSELF. Every semantic move takes us away from the information that we want to interpret. . . . People only *have* half of their experience (and probably less than that, I imagine) because they go with the semantic rules rather than the information which sustains it. I want to say that Coolidge's poetry communciates not meaning but orientation, a ground of information. It is extremely articulate communication. . . . I take that the *information* in Coolidge's work is absolute, and it might pose a nice semantic problem to "interpret" it. However, we want the *meaning* of information, which we get by applying a rule, and it gives us the meaning of the *rule*, rather than the meaning of the information.

This brings me back to free jazz. A set of chord changes is a semantic. The important thing that happened in jazz between that night in a chili house on 142nd Street, in 1939 (the year of Coolidge's birth, incidentally), when Bird finally figured out, he says, how to play *Cherokee* and Coleman's realization that he could be wrong even when there were no rules, moves us into language without semantics. [Learning how to deal with this situation seems our current task.]

We passed beyond the closure of metaphysics about 1850, with the discovery that any number of inconsistent axiom sets would produce consistent geometries, and the literati have yet to hear about it. *Logos*, however, was just a sadly squeezed version of *mythos*, which required not *a* Word, but a large narrative system of words. Human history from the caves to 1959 was informed by those vast generalizations that we call archetypes (i.e., the *logos* in drag). About that time, we also passed beyond MYTHOS [as archetype, as generalization; the mythological material which comes into *Maximus*, for example, is just material, i.e. concrete and available, like the history of Gloucester, or what CO encountered on the streets]. As of 1960, the approach to the absolute was no longer by way of an idea or the concrete pictures and stories behind ideas, it was direct, immediate, and COMMON.

So I think it is wrong to see the Lake Isle of Innisfree behind Clark's poems. They are NOT about somewhere else . . . It seems to me completely located. No mysticism of the stone. Every thing is here, or, there, on the side of Lebanon Mountain [where he lives].

In a human context [also in the context of telephones, etc., I suppose] information is news of another. . . . a sign that there is someone out there (and this is rare: most common I guess in sexual encounters and the reason they are desirable). So your conclusion – that the poems are information of "a living individual, and English is his native language" – speaks of a wonderful fact, that we have "company" (thinking of Beckett's use of that word). There IS someone out there, and I can read Coolidge tirelessly for that assurance. Often things come across, to which semantic rules can be applied, especially in *Crystal Text*, it seems to me, and some of them return often enough to begin to confirm that Coolidge and I might know some of the same rules. It's an orientation, a confidence underlying language which can be heard, with immediacy. This is exciting.

You'd think that to find company in poetry is a common experience, which might pass without comment. The common, however, is drowned in the babble of intersubjectivity: we are they; it is language; we are victimized by a rich of meanings. In "A Note," Clark writes:

> I think then I live in a world of silence.
> The language has become lodged in itself a background,
> wall of rock, black and resistant as basalt, then sometimes
> as viscous as heavy grease, poetry must be reached into
> and rested from in a cry.

Poetry occurs in the gaps or spaces which have not been filled-in by language or which can somehow be created in the dense mass: "I listen to what burns get tuned," Coolidge says, "I listen to the holes." ("Our Nature's Future") On the cover of the book in which these passages appear, there is a a photograph of Floyd Collins, the famous spelunker of the 1920's. Beneath the picture, there is the title, *Own Face* and Coolidge's signature. Although the photograph is identified on the copyright page – "Floyd Collins as he appeared in 1925 shortly before his death in Sand Cave, Kentucky" – Collins is mentioned obliquely only one other time in the volume, in a poem entitled "Floyd's Beancans." The ratio, Coolidge to Collins, nonetheless, is clear; indeed the Collins of the photograph has an eery resemblance to Coolidge. Collins is not a persona or mask; Coolidge does not take on a character. Rather he makes a proper claim of a face (from Latin, *facere*, to make, form) and a name, not an identity. If he establishes property rights, it is to the distance *between* himself and Collins, which is a function of both similarities *and* differences. In another poem, "My Gaps are Bags," Coolidge writes:

Since I can't write well by hand, I write
all the time. My hand shakes to a
rhythm I can't understand.

The title is a complex play on "Bags' Groove," the title of a tune by Milt "Bags" Jackson of the Modern Jazz Quartet. The poem does not register the *language* of the other but his *silences*, the gaps in the groove. In the flow, Coolidge attends to the interstices. And, so, it is Bags to Clark to us, opening some breathing space and informing us.]

Clark inscribed our copy of *Crystal Text*, "For Don and Marge, A yankee way of knowledge (?)" and so it is.

Be well!

DON BYRD

CLARK COOLIDGE, SOLUTION PASSAGE, POEMS 1978-1981 Sun & Moon Press, 1986

Don Byrd has usefully castigated conventional readings of poetry as eliciting nothing but "a meaning glow," a tag that links poetry production with network television programming. Both have largely ceased carrying any information in its raw state, preferring instead to transmit a feeble electrical gleam. Most poems, like most tv episodes, bear a simple message: they say that the transmitter and the receiver work, therefore the channel is intact. In doing so – however unconsciously – they perform a strictly maintenance function on the equipment, reinforcing the self-assurance of the social sockets and circuits. Only rarely do we sense the pertinent disruption of information as unrefined *material*, richly plural, aggravatingly unmanageable, challenging the uniform scale of all those modular poetry chips out there. *Solution Passage* is just such an upheaval, the real boy really crying "wolf" (or in Coolidge's obliquity, "What's it come to but a striped boy shouting 'Mica?' " [p. 21]).

Consider Fred Dretske[1]: "Meaning, and the constellation of mental attitudes that exhibit it, are manufactured products. The raw material is information." The universe is packed with information, most of which is inaccessible to us without the aid of high-powered microscopes or radio-telescopes. As Dretske says, "In the beginning was information. The word came later." That is, a word is a selection of information. Each language has a different assortment of words for colors. The reduction to the English

word "white" of a score of Eskimo terms for the colors of snow abandons the Eskimo information. "Meaning is generated by the way information is *coded.*"[2] (As any reader of *The Cantos* can attest, Pound sought to generate meaning by transfiguring information, liberating it from customary contexts into the supra-text of his poem.)

We can experience information without adducing meaning, just as we can gauge the tenor of a conversation in a strange language without understanding a word. In fact, our brains actively suppress information to avoid overstimulation. This is how *meaning* is elicited. The danger of meaning is that it becomes addictive. Dretske suggests that information be regarded as "semantically relevant"[3] but distinct from meaning as such. In other words, the greater the access to the variety of information available, the better off we are – so long as we can abstain from bestowing *habitual* meanings, or abusively colonizing the information to soak up a meaning glow.

Solution Passage is a book that feeds into one of the central issues of information theory, that of entropy or disorder.[4] *Information* in its broad, cosmic sense, is raw material, an indistinguishable mass. It's noise, it's randomness, it's what presents itself as inherently meaningless, chaotic. It's entropic. In 1949 Warren Weaver suggested as evidence of entropy in language the phrase "Constantinople fishing nasty pink."[5] Compare this with "molasses arrow stunt boiler" – a typical line from *The Maintains*; compare it for that matter with most of Coolidge's earlier work. Such phrases communicate information but little or no meaning. They're evidence of randomness. They lack the glue, the 50% redundancy which English is calculated to consist of. Half of the words we use are not chosen freely but represent the statistical (structural) requirements of the language. For messages to persist in the midst of noise, it's necessary to encode the message with redundancy. *Meaning* is obtained when the same point is made over and over (or when the coding itself reinforces a particular meaning). Coolidge started off by forgoing redundancy: *Space, The Maintains* and *Polaroid* chronicle the struggle. *Quartz Hearts, American Ones* and *Own Face* represent determined forays into sentence and phrase that can only be accomplished with redundancy. *Solution Passage* boldly presses the issue to the juncture between noise and meaning, entropy and message.

Perched at that seam where noise threatens any message, Coolidge's poems stand out with unforgettable singularity as ripples of order, transitory but charged with the shock of sudden unsolicited evidence of life itself. Working on the edge like this isn't achieved without complicity. Missing information is something which sender and receiver conspire on together, like when a bluesman appeals to his audience, "help me, help me now." Coolidge is always leaving out as much as he's putting in, but "Still these omissions have their balance . . . / Will what you mean to follow see me through?" (p. 78). There's always the sense that noise and

disorder are inherent in the channel. "Sometimes the words will not mean / what they must mean to others to me." (p. 115). Not only do meanings bump and grind, mix and clash, but writing makes its own noise. Where most poets try to exorcise that noise, Coolidge abets it.

> . . . the finches are sprouting with their
> metal spring rain songs. And the drench penciling
> down you hear, if not only the hiss high pure pitch
> of the inner ear. (p. 161)

The inner ear has its own residual noise, which even the most precise attention to fine-tuning will not abolish. "The mot juste / is not a puncture-sealer." (p. 224).

Solution Passage is a large book—in fact, there's no precedent for a 400 page collection of a poet's work selected from a mere 3 or 4 years—but the axiom holds true, statistically *and* conceptually. *Solution Passage* does contain more information—however you define it—than the usual 80 page poetry book. This proposition puts us in the tricky spotlight already hexed and vexed by the likes of Enslin and Kelly, among others. How much is enough?[6] I suggest that Coolidge's work, through that semantic puzzle that makes his phrasing congruent with Weaver's "Constantinople fishing nasty pink," makes the issue of bulk relevant again because it does so impinge on the statistical issues of communication. The very ideology of poetry as concise, direct, unmediated transport of experience is called into question by a book that irreverently transcribes as much noise as it does "meaning." But this is no idle slap in the face of public taste: growth, learning, identity are never easily attained. The process is manifold, repetitive, entropic. "I have no slant on my self but these hearty / interminable dicings." (p. 111).

Coolidge ultimately draws more from that open flowing Kerouac exaltation of "whether I want to or write" (p. 104) than from any modular constructivist poetics. *Solution Passage* makes credible again the notion that poetry be read with the same stamina applied to prose. No *mot juste* aesthetics can disguise the realities of process, heat, and abundant cumulative formations (the redundancy that informs). Coolidge is clearly a processual poet—in exactly the senses applied during the 1960s (the issue is not, all claims to the contrary, yet expired). For him, there is no rewriting as such, no recourse but to "crack a further page of the strapping vein bulk manual / and thrive back in, and dine" (p. 98).

Coolidge goes back through Kerouac not only for a basis in spontaneous improvisatory writing but also to draw on jazz. His "Note on Bop" (in *Vanishing Cab #4*, reprinted in Michael Palmer's *Code of Signals* pp. 258-260) constitutes his *ars poetica*, and his citation of drummer Elvin Jones summarily dispenses with the issue of bulk: "The length of my solos doesn't mean anything. When I go on for so long, I am looking for the right way

to get out. Sometimes the door goes right by and I don't see it, so I have to wait until it comes around again. Sometimes it doesn't come around at all for a long long time." Where most poems propagate themselves by means of formal structure, those in *Solution Passage* are experienced more like jazz solos, too long or too short or just right—depending on your enthusiasm in the heat of the performance—but primary evidence of decisions made on the spur of the moment, each moment looping through others in an organic vortex of sheer duration. In the "Note on Bop" the crucial issue is how to grab hold and ride the impulse: ". . . the shaping of the always initial impact becomes the highest of enveloping tasks." There is no line, no beginning, immune from the stress of its enveloping task. Coolidge's are poems "composed of the empty space of the first thought the second thought erased."

The traditional bop procedure of duplicating standard pop song structure is a bit misleading as to the nature of Coolidge's debt to the music. His writing seems more to begin with the spaciest of free jazz as precedent and work backwards in time, to the point now in *Solution Passage* where, if the choruses as such aren't evident, the lyrical organization at least seems intent on some kind of *return* to first principles (or "enveloping task"). The longest poem in the book is "Of What The Music To Me," and a host of overt and veiled references to jazz run through many of the poems. But the issue is not to forward a jazz semantic. Coolidge's poems consist of very specific language events, making them remote from any mode of writing "about" a given topic. Take the line "rolling my hands to a flash of theme / in ascension . . ." (p. 61). This could easily be read as what the hands of the poet do in writing, rolling themes toward the ascendancy of the inspiration. But Coolidge happens to be a drummer, likely to have played along with the recording of Coltrane's epochal 1965 disc *Ascension*. As a phrase, "rolling my hands to a flash of theme / in ascension" communicates evocatively whether you know this or not. *If* you do, you can see how the line has been encoded as it were with a kind of redundancy, two messages impacted in one. Later in *Solution Passage* a use of the capital letter A accentuates the impact: "in Ascension the bits come therming down" (p. 374)—a line that returns us squarely to the ground of information theory, which derives the notion of entropy from *therm*odynamics. The bits that heat up in Coltrane are "bits" also in that technical sense (short for *bi*nary uni*ts*), meaning an irreduceable element of encoded information. *Ascension* remains a high point of "Free particle jazz" (p. 373), evidence of "Ecstasy impossible to be memorized" (p. 289, referring actually to Ornette Coleman). The heat of the moment in poetry or music is always charged with multiplicity (think of Whitman with his multitudes), however solitary its enactment may appear. Even so unclouded a line as "Nobody knows the numeral troubles I shine" (p. 216) is a switchboard of contending phrases: "Nobody knows the troubles I seen"

merges with "trouble in mind" to make the line. And no matter what record executives may think, "Nobody's mind is reissued." (p. 375).

These multiple impactions in Coolidge's poems don't make for easy reading. (*Light*, yes, in the sense of levity: his humor is sly but pervasive.) Some suggestions are in order. The poems are above all lyrical and rhetorical. To read them aloud is not only to be reminded of the jazz link, but to be confronted directly with the rhythmic persuasions that organize the poems' dynamics. "Meaning" in the conventional sense is largely avoided; as Don Byrd says, Coolidge "is stringent and gives into meaning only when it is irresistible." There is instead a certitude of momentum which is meaningful like music is (and makes it meaningless to characterize the power of a Coltrane solo by the key modulations or number of 16th notes played).

The perceptual apparatus is lyric but not particularly imagistic, that overworked vein—

> The Memory of Seeing, who can tell just how
> tainted it is with invention. And the
> uncontrollable solders of intention that tend to leak. (p. 287)

Coolidge is nonetheless "A graduate of world enough and tongue" (p. 195)—not entirely disaffiliated from the lyrical persuasions of Wordsworth—and it comes across most pertinently when the poems are read aloud. (The full force of this realization hit me only when I listened to a tape I'd made of myself reading some poems from *Solution Passage* several months earlier, so that the time lag had defamiliarized them and my vocalization made clear many things which had in silent readings sunken back into incomprehensibility.)

Solution Passage is a book that thoroughly saturates (contaminates) the *space of the lyric* in American verse practice, pre-empting the homespun self-conscious awkward intensities of an A.R. Ammons (to cite only a characteristic exponent of all that Coolidge erodes). The lyrical struggle is chronicled in three encounters with Rilke, the most insistent voice behind the poem-as-song (enlarged to Being in Rilke's "Gesang ist Dasein").[7] Coolidge manages to retain his own ear's persuasions—informed as ever with the spunky sweetness of jazz—while admitting to the contagions of Rilke's deep center:

> The fear of death is like a wheel in the brain
> whirling wider with no read to express.
> And here and there by the weed a puff of sex. (p. 116)

The full impact is best seen in an encounter that hearkens back to the legendary "cutting sessions" in jazz (which reportedly drove the young Charlie Parker to tears):

SHIED WITNESSES

Rilke, give me your paw.
And we will ladder our pain across pointless vasts
striking eachother like Dumbs to the Head.
There is no light in Kafka, there is no mass to you.
You light but do not heat the Dense, or do you
hate? In a turret above your neighboring
countess' farm you switch an arm as if
a broom across the page, and return to
the blinding squares an initial and a date.
You and I a vow primed to meet
the Language meshed enough to hold
what veers but nears.
You will not bear. I will not wait.

Coolidge's preference as always is to heat, not light, the densities of language – for language, being entropic, is always collapsing in on itself, creating as much confusion and darkness as clarity. What Rilke "will not bear" is precisely that birthing of prodigious density which Coolidge seems intent on throughout *Solution Passage*, best exemplified by "the unceasing teem of that top cymbal" which he claims as a basis for his lines, and is the earmark of bop drumming, a surging hiss like breakers along a coast.

Coolidge's poems are in fact so densely written that *all* the words feel like nouns. The space is crammed, but the lines are clean. The model is more Picasso than Rilke: "I want to develop great cracks / in my solid like Picasso" (p. 140) – cracks through which whatever light there is comes streaming through, seminally, sexually. "The body (her) at last from all angles at once / (Picasso had it)" – enabling "Everything that could ever / be written in a single sudden hand gesture." (p. 198). The process is irreverent with regard to the channel (the conventions of the lyric poem), but full of reverence for the continuity of the act:

. . . Writing *is* a prayer for
always it starts at the portal lockless to me at last leads
to the mystery of everything that has always been written.
(p. 25)

Coolidge's relentless concretization is sustained through a complete avoidance of terminology associated with modern idealisms like semiotics, structuralism, Marxism, or archetypal psychology, to name a few. This Yankee distrust of jargon makes for a serviceable poetics which, *as* a poetics, can only be articulated in terms of the concrete practices of jazz drummers in "A Note on Bop." No generalities, no categories, just a proliferation of discrete phenomena. No ideology to allow you to race ahead in a Coolidge poem, gasping with the pleasure of anticipated unity (compare anything in *Solution Passage* with a Robert Bly poem). There's

nothing here that proposes to guide your life: the sensory inertia is all yours to grasp and move as you can. The poems are evidence of a separate life, lived elsewhere, dense with "not knowledge but embrace. / The heat of luck in proximity. / The ponder." (p. 137).[8]

Coolidge has by now laid some very large eggs (stones, fossils, call them what you will) which the future course of American poetry cannot legitimately ignore. *Solution Passage* is scrupulously exasperating on both the macro- and the microscopic levels. Like Williams, Olson, and Spicer, Coolidge has left creases in the smooth fabric of American poetry that can't be disregarded, even if your goal is just to iron them out. In the end I suspect his won't be a cosmetic wrinkle, either, but a deeper seismic rupture, suitable to the torments of the Age of Information, alert, answerable, and mortal:

AN OPEN ELSE

Would you have us start before the Morse?
Tapping within skin on a room, as the air war
laws above all our sectioned flare.
Stone before the mirror? Face before dark?
Raise a fist and make a finger of it point?
These creases are questions, the chamber clad
the cartridge, locked as mackerel.
In the sky a hair, ladder as a thigh
and as kept, stroke without purchase
slicing through to past us.

I would toast a new face on the duck.
I would hide behind the onyx stripe of law.
Here would be the matchless pen of beings
arraying me outright and thrall-thronged to tip
at the very wheat of the railing in ambers
of a knob or nod.

Come out. Cross the house. Talk from
the slice of your solving organ and let
the taking clouds go crack, the point is
in the mint of clocked sticks to mesh.
Nobody owns the Ruled Divan of Mesa Portion.
But I will clip some light from the canter of its axes.
Mission normal.

(p. 192)

JED RASULA

[1]Fred I. Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* (MIT, 1981) p. vii
[2]Dretske, p. 248
[3]Dretske, p. 46
[4]Claude Shannon of Bell Labs launched information theory in the late 1940s in order to demonstrate mathematically (and thus technologically) that messages could persist in the midst of haphazard noise or disorder. The primary mechanical problem underlying clear transmission in radio, tv, telephone, etc., is how to send a message so it survives the residual noise in the channel used to convey it. How can you distinguish information from noise? An illustration: a glass of water is entropic. That is, its contents are uniform; each molecule is indistinguishable from any other. Add an ice cube and a singularity has arisen: everything in the glass is still water, but there's now something to talk about, to distinguish. Ice is information, and the water it's in is noise. When the ice melts it's all noise (or all information, but all of which is inaccessible *as* information). Language is comparable: a random list of words is noise, but a phrase – not even a complete sentence – is an eruption of message values.
[5]Claude Shannon & Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Univ. of Illinois Press, 1949), p. 102
[6]I want to decentralize the issue of "strong" and "weak" poems by mentioning it only in a footnote. But *Solution Passage* does contain a considerable number of impenetrable, intractable, habit-laden poems, real obstacles to reading Coolidge at all. For what it's worth, after a half-dozen readings I find sections 1 and 5 the weakest, 2 and 7 the most consistently engaging, along with much of 3, 4 and 6. It should be mentioned that *Solution Passage* is not strictly speaking Coolidge's doing; the book was solicited by Douglas Messerli for *Sun & Moon*. Coolidge's already large manuscript was doubled per Messerli's request.

As for recommended approaches: one way is to read Coolidge's portraits of/encounters with actual historical figures, of which there are many that move with the critical concision and exacting inspiration of Mina Loy's great precedents in her poems on Joyce, Brancusi, Wyndham Lewis etc. See: "Homage to Melville," "The Century That Breaks" (Picasso), "A Chimney for Max Jacob," "Lights of Things an Autumn" (Tanguy), "Pauses Covered with Looks" (Wallace Stevens), "Portrait Distracted" (Hitler), "After Beckett" and "The Cubists" for a start (there are many more), along with the three that grapple with Rilke which I cite in the text.
[7]See *Solution Passage*, pp. 116, 126, 190.
[8]The heat flows in several directions. When I first read *Solution Passage* and started conceiving of it in terms of entropy and information theory, the poems evoked for me the fancy of a porn film designed to illustrate the laws of thermodynamics – with a suitably saucy title, "The Edification of Entropy" – and it was shortly afterwards that Coolidge's "Book of During" began to appear in *Sulfur*.

IN "THE CEDAR DOOR"

Ah, there you be, Eshuman. Glad you found the place. I begin with three short sentences. Now four. But why? (Now five.) Short sentences are for people whose show of fortitude enables others to imagine that, if only the secret were out, they'd be tyrannicides. So let me, since you asked me, once Rebecca here has unloaded that carafe, thank you mam, launch

out and address the subject of the *Totengespräch.* (Was ist das? What the dead say to one another. What they say to us.) This can't be exactly it, only something like it. These dead haven't lost all features by which the living might recognize them; but the only features you can't mistake seems to be their voices. Voices, doing what? Making a murmur. Out of the murmur you or I can tease elements of a discourse, about cyclones perhaps, about grasses, or stones, pulpiness, hardly any adjectives, perhaps kidneys. I mean the hubbub of the dead, or their hosannas, which we do garble so, interposing empty distance between ourselves and them. Of such hosannas we can have inklings, if we hearken through loopholes in our own speech patterns. Lend thine Orphic ear to the dead: murmuring voices, they have forgotten all vocal occasions by which we set great store. Occasions, also syntax, clean gone, I expect. All we have is inklings.

Several sentences, too long to quote, in Michel Leiris, have struck me as being uncannily close (though he was coming from a different direction) to what, subterraneously, has been transpiring in certain German poems since the robe of Rilke, tattered and torn, stained with blood, or not, was variously picked up – like an Inca textile – out of the ideological and military mud of the First Fascist Epoch, by poets temperamentally most diverse, since about 1945. That's my drift, but I won't make an ocean of it. Leiris writes in "Words/Swerves" (*Sulfur* 15), for example, concerning the impetus given him by his research (during the 1930s) into the secret Dogon language: "these words . . . have come to me laden with a . . . dose of mystery." He writes of "an activity that if it is not an elucidation is at least that transposition into the speech of the Other . . . a sort of language of death: a scrambled language tied to the traditional *upside down world* popular imagery makes into a theme of burlesqued, comic-book-style illustrations . . ." He writes of a form of utterance that might be "a language of the other side," of a "language" that has broken with norms to give him "a notion of the strictly unimaginable nothingness beyond the grave . . . as far from common talk as the sacred is from the profane." He proposes that "this idiom . . . helps me feel less wholly disoriented before that NOTHING (. . . absolutely nothing, and not even the word's echo), less disarmed confronting that unknown which . . . ceases to be mere negativity . . . with the result that . . . the horror of future annihilation . . . is drawn out of its diabolically imperceptible nullity thanks to the illusion of a bridge linguistically suspended." And more – but these quotations will have to do. Besides, I can't quote verbatim his elaborations, even if I could intuit his grounds for believing that the *theater* of French parlance must enshrine some sort of an incandescent Dionysus.

For Leiris, writing as an octogenarian of marvelous intellectual vitality and honesty (no "vision," only "conjecture"), the idea of a language of the "other," the mere idea of it, helps him, if you will, to fit more comfortably between the enormous molars of death. Not that such an idea

diminishes the horror of the Death-Other; but it seems to make that Death-Other recognizable as a member of a family, along with other members which aren't unfamiliar in this here-and-now, e.g. the reversed world of old French iconology, with Mr Incredible (M. L'eusses-tu-cru) as its hero. In the poems of Nelly Sachs (born 1891, writing in Sweden, in her fifties and sixties), in a splendid enigmatic poem of Günter Eich, his "Fortsetzung des Gesprächs" (early 1960s), and pervasively in Paul Celan's poems, notably "Engführung" – "Stretto" – there's a congruent concern. I should mention, too, several startling poems by Johannes Bobrowski (early 1960s, especially) which envisage a kind of *transmortal* space of mind, but do not shrink at all from response to the *elements* of earth and air into which that space erupts. A congruent concern, Eshuman. How, in what linguistic patterns, by what subversions of the norm, can even poetic conventions be so revised as to suggest the speech of the dead and conversation with the dead? What would they say, how would they say it? How can a poetic text include the "dark" murmur that drifts always, if we hearken at all, out of that terrifying and bewildering "world" of their extinctness into our provisional shelters, or edifices of say-so, into the palaces, perhaps, of our spellbinding nonsense? Rilke is the great provocateur of questions like these. The questions, after him, for German poets, rotate around a set of notions touched, as it were, into position by his coinages such as *Totenbewusstsein* and *Weltinnenraum* (in each of these communion between the living and the dead, as well as a highly sophisticated version of topsyturvydom, figure large). It begins in Rilke long before the Elegies and Sonnets of 1922. His "Requiem für eine Freundin" of 1908 is a poem so spoken as to appease Paula Becker's uncertain ghost – finally to turn everything around and appeal to her, to "help me."

Celan's "Engführung," (*Sprachgitter*, 1959), which condenses just about every gist of his poems up till that date, and several shorter poems of the same period, probe into the "other" space-time and in so doing – in so provoking speech from the dead – invite the poetic word to reconstitute itself. Yet Celan, here, I think, is coming from the Kabbalah, certainly not from the secret language of the Dogon people. I'd refer in this matter to Gershom Scholem's *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, pp. 122-25 (Schocken, 1969) – "everything not only *is in* everything else but also *acts upon* everything else," citing also Recanati (1581) on ritual action that initiates a circuitry between divine and human, in order to conduct an energy out of the "nothingness of the divine idea" and thus to "lend stability, as it were, to a part of God Himself, if it is permissible to speak in this way." Certainly, too, Celan's singular need was to establish communion with those murdered kin of his, his family and fellows in Czernovitz. Günter Eich, no less, one generation older, coming from his own wry scepticism and from the study of Chinese culture, "suspends his linguistic bridge"

across the divisive Nothing, quietly (no "distortion" in his imagery) to discern "the dead man looking at the ammonite."

It's my impression that Leiris' discourse owes nothing to Celan. But presumably he'll have known about Celan (suicided in 1970), even if he didn't know, let alone appreicate, Celan's Nervalesque probings toward a dialogue with departed spirits, his negotiating such a dialogue in allegedly "absurd" or "paradoxical" imagery, in puns, in shreddings of phrase and syntax. Doubtless Eugene Jolas' "vertigral" program of the 1930s—in *Transition*—belongs here: the "language of the night." And of course, yes, the perennial Orphic tradition is being transformed in these crystallizations of ideas about a renegade lyrical mode that must estrange itself from the "logical collars" (Leiris) of normal discourse (poetic or otherwise), in order to track the motions of the unknown. What intrigues me—talking here behind a "Cedar Door," for that's what this bar is called, pine or cedar, take your pick—is the recent florescence, in German, of poems countersensical, deviant, and renegade. Playfully or not, antidiscursively or not, these poems gainsay not just current speech but any consensus as to how, as language, meanings tend to be made. For instance—the "Crimean Gothic" texts, vocally hilarious (and pokerfaced as Buster Keaton), intelligible in flashes alone, dense as they are eruptive, by Oskar Pastior, who came out of Romania to Berlin in 1968. I'm also thinking of the asyntactical collages of Friederike Mayröcker. I'm thinking of not only the middle-period sound-poems of Ernst Jandl, but also of his *moronic* poems in a kind of German pidgin (*Die Bearbeitung der Mütze*, 1978). The last are "semantic," to be sure, but it's as if the sounds and syntax of German had been melted down. What one can hear is a godforsaken voice on a phonograph record still softened—yet miraculously purified—by having been passed through a fire. Well, not all these idiolect texts betoken a solemn craving for contact with spirits. Some, Pastior certainly, are incitements to resistance in a disspirited world, excitements to high spirits among those of us who are living, liberations—from the quasideath of entrapment in routine utterance (including the poetic, no, the literary routines).

Even then, solemn or carnivalesque, there's common ground, I suspect. There's a congruence between these strategies. After all, to hazard a guess, if the dead wanted anything at all, it'd be a hilarity in the here-and-now. I know a few who wouldn't want to recross the "linguistic bridge" into our *Dasein* and *Hiersein* merely to mope.

And I love the curious tonal workmanship there is in these poems. I think, too, of the (putatively 10th century A.D.) *Nine Songs*, the Chinese odes that invite the spirits to be there, later bidding them farewell. Wasn't the gap in the middle not a poem at all, but a dance? The poets I'm thinking about—and thanks, Rebecca—are looking for the words which might

mean what that *ludic* dance had to "say." Here and there, in one way or the other, there were artists wondering how to slay the tyrant Automaton. And behold, by wondering the tyrant can be slain. Yet because there is such an absence of wonder Automaton persistently stands up again. He presides over regulative language. He conspires with the "diabolically imperceptible nullity" in its "Other" aspect. What, now, if Leiris and these poets have been working in wonder to reduce, hacking away at it, the mass of that imperceptibility? Finally what can all this mean in a country where, lip-service aside, and obsessions (more or less biological) aside, death is dirty and life is cheap?

CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

ROMAN POEMS: PIER PAOLO PASOLINI
translated by Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Francesca Valenti
City Lights Books, 1986

In the preface to an inexpensive paperback selected poems which came out in 1970, Pasolini eagerly welcomed the "new reader" to his work. He was enthusiastic about the possibility of his poetry finding a larger audience: he wanted to reach the man in the street, not just the intellectual elite. If he were alive today, he would be pleased by the new City Lights edition entitled *Roman Poems*, translated by Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Francesca Valenti. Surely it will increase his American readership. It is not the first time Pasolini's poetry has been available in a paperback English translation. The substantial volume translated by Norman MacAfee and Luciano Martinengo, and published by Random House, came out in a Vintage paperback three years ago. A large selection of Pasolini, about half the length of the City Lights edition, appeared my *The New Italian Poetry: 1945 to the Present* (University of California Press), also in paperback, two years before that. However, Ferlinghetti and Valenti have offered us a new piece of the puzzle named Pier Paolo Pasolini. There is little overlap in the three books. Whereas the MacAfee/Martinengo selection and mine stressed the longer works, Ferlinghetti and Valenti have concentrated on shorter pieces.

Roman Poems is a handsome book, including six photographs of him (one on the cover) with street kids against a background of shacks and housing projects. These photographs humanize the legendary Pasolini. They place him with his chosen people; this was his milieu. The

photographs also reinforce the significance of the City Lights title, because *Roman Poems* is not the name of a Pasolini book, but rather a guiding theme in the selection Ferlinghetti and Valenti have made from seven original books. Yet this presents a problem. There are at least as many more Pasolini poems related to Rome as those which have been included here. Of course, decisions are always difficult. Pasolini's complete poems (Garzanti, 1975) is almost one thousand pages long. And that doesn't include his dialect poetry, which is collected in another large volume. However, some of the poems which Ferlinghetti and Valenti have passed over are vital to the Roman theme. Especially notable is the absence of "Le ceneri di Gramsci" ("Gramsci's Ashes"), the title poem of Pasolini's first major book and a fundamental "Roman poem" by anyone's definition. Perhaps it has been passed over because it was translated in its entirety in both the Random House and the University of California Press volumes, but at least part of it might have been included.

The title *Roman Poems* carries other problems as well. It is true that Pasolini sets these poems in and around Rome, chiefly in the slums which skirt the city. But the poems are not regional in a straightforward way, in spite of many local references, such as the mention of the Trastevere and Caracalla's baths. Instead the focus is on the sub-proletariat, the poor peasants who had been transplanted from all over Italy—but chiefly from the South—to this desperate existence on the periphery of the great city. It is to these outcasts, among whom Pasolini and his mother lived for a time, that he devotes his attention. He finds in them an anguished beauty which is missing in the middle class, and even in the working class which had begun to achieve financial gains. Considered from this perspective, there are many other poems which could have been included, because he depicts the struggle which rages in the "Roman poems" in almost everything he wrote, regardless of the regional backdrop. And his emphasis on the poor and backward "Southern" is ubiquitous, even in his movie *The Decameron*, where he purposefully changed the locale from Tuscany to Naples and its surrounding towns.

The selection made by Ferlinghetti and Valenti raises another question. They end the "Roman poems" with "Quadri friulani" ("Friulian Paintings") and two poems translated from the Friulian dialect. This apparent departure from the book's theme offers a perfect chance to explore the more complex issue of the peasant primitive vs. the urban middle class. However, since neither an ideological nor an aesthetic context have been provided, it seems like a confusing afterthought.

The translations in the City Lights volume are careful and accurate, but they too raise some troubling questions. Pasolini's outstanding stylistic quality is an ecstatic, operatic lyricism, coupled with a careening momentum which sweeps the reader away on a wave of language. Such qualities

are almost never achieved in these translations. Ferlinghetti has adopted the practice of cutting many of the Pasolini lines into half-lines, which may work in Ferlinghetti's poetry but is directly contrary to the nature of the original. For example, consider the following passage from "Chiusa la festa . . ." ("The Holiday Over . . ."):

> Chiusa la festa su una Roma sorda
> a ogni ingenua attesa, chiusa la sera,
> come immondizie al vento i passi
> del ritorno, le voci, i fischi, vanno
> morendo vasti per le strade, vuoti
> negli androni . . .
>
> The holiday is over, in a Rome deaf
> to all naive expectations,
> the night falling
> like trash on the wind,
> returning footsteps, voices,
> whistles fading away,
> farflung in the streets,
> hollow in the hallways . . .

What is energetic and expansive in the original has become terse (even though the number of lines has been expanded) and tight-lipped in the translation. All of Pasolini's lines are enjambed, except one. Ferlinghetti end-stops six of his eight shortened lines. It is hard to see what has been gained. Interestingly, in "Il pianto della scavatrice" ("The Weeping of the Excavator"), where Pasolini's lines are already short, Ferlinghetti and Valenti have chosen in many cases to double them up.

If most of these translations don't sing, it hardly makes *Roman Poems* a failure. Pasolini is one of the hardest modern Italian poets to translate, not because he is crabbed and hermetic like Montale, but because the sound and rhythm of his poetry are so hard to render in English. None of the three volumes cited has achieved that goal throughout, although each one has its tantalizing moments. I suspect that it would take a cross between Walt Whitman and the young Dylan Thomas to get much closer in our language.

It will be unfortunate if Pasolini's great difficulty scares off English translators in the future, because there is much left to be done. He is a giant figure in Italy and throughout Europe. His work seemed to foreshadow the appearance of what we now call "liberation theology," and that combination of Christianity and Marxism opened him to attacks from both the left and right. But he proves, in the very lines he writes, that politics does have a place in the avant-garde; experimental works do not exist in an aesthetic vacuum. In the late 1950s, when Pasolini an-

nounced the beginning of the "new experimentalism," defying the mandates of a neo-realism which had proved to be too limiting, he set in motion the most important avant-garde movement which has appeared in Europe since the end of World War II. We need to listen to Pasolini and to the avant-garde he liberated. Likewise, the new generation of American formalists has much to learn from Pasolini. In adapting ancient forms to his use, especially Dante's *terza rima*, Pasolini showed that there is vitality in all great literature from all periods. But he also showed that those forms cannot be accepted without modification, without an infusion of passion, and without far-reaching experimentation. Pasolini's strange mixture of aesthetic conservatism and radicalism avoided both blandness and preciosity.

LAWRENCE R. SMITH

ROVA NOTES

If this morning's wake-up note is a $C^{\#}$ (and I notice this helplessly) how will the musics I hear today relate to that?

or a very long improvisation

by Cecil Taylor . . .

*

Time & Sound, a marriage made in certain simple rooms.
One of the strangenesses of the word "time": that it is singular.
With Rova, the fixed and the moving.

*

Music sometimes takes quite some lengths just to declare *a* sound.

*

One is hardly ever *completely listening* (which requires a devotion to time of the wild leap), therefore what follows such reduced attention generates

little but quick opinion, and you can feel the mass of all you missed draining away. Music must *be* the room you are in, for the duration.

*

Some sounds are not apparent in a music but have to be searched for (listened out) like that thing you didn't notice right away turned up in the corner of the room behind the silent radio. I couldn't hear it at first. Then it was all I could hear.

*

Endless material could be written into and out of this music. Though to apply any purely explicatory language to it is almost a crime, for that operation tends the sounds back to an overly dusted self-standard. To sound is to resist rested definition, to leave oneself outward into a trend where the fissures and masses spring a feeling free of its telling.

*

A still generative statement by Cecil Taylor, copied into my 1963 notebook: "You are the recipient of all the cultural things around you that you wish to be – things like dance, theater, literature, the people you see, so you are a departure."

*

Immersion in the states of a thing, it takes.
And the counted same you will never have.

*

The will to include enough *differences* is already a move toward the outside. Ornette Coleman points to zones of his Free Jazz session where "the freedom even becomes impersonal."

*

In a time when it gets increasingly hard to pay complete attention to any music, Rova creates a situation beyond my memories of hearing. And it is a *full* act, an animate field shorn of none of its . . .
Maybe memory *is* the problem?

*

Suppose you rehearse the Bartok Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, say, at such length it lifts completely from the paper, you can hum its every distinction in mind as wholly as the chord changes to I Got Rhythm, until its structure is shaping the least parts of your dailiness, beyond the rigidities of recall. You play the concert as planned and then it is over. A depression sets in. Why can you not go on? And suppose most of your playing experience has been in an improvised music, jazz. Your next thought urges continuance. Everything predicts it. How can this intensely structured score just stop at the last page?

A prime of jazz can thus be seen as a will toward mutability of any musical material in time. No composition need freeze in a single state. The possibilities seem limitless. Any horizons transitional.

Whereas, in the badly-termed "classical" sector, a Glenn Gould's performances are called "interpretations" and are criticized for eroding sanctified facets of "perfect" scores, though he has looked deeply enough into this music to realize that there is little point in adding another recording of a Mozart sonata, say, unless one plays it in a radically different way, *changes* it.

And Morton Feldman has written a string quartet four hours in length. He obviously does not want his music to settle for the truncated life of what Cecil Taylor has called "viable bended plants that can be put in anybody's garden," and goes on to speak memorably of "the life of the piece" as an increasingly primary concern.

"Kinds" of music (those sanitizing labels) no longer seem to drag along their own built-in and abstract barriers, and there is now a freed-up crossing, a taking from wherever, in motion, integral, recombinant. And acting up into the next state.

These are significant changes in realization. Rova's music enters here. And won't let you off the hook of the vast momentary, a sound too extensive for any single frame.

*

There should be another word.
"Improvise," in American English, having the connotations of last minute jury-rigging or "making something up" when you're not prepared, a fudging due to the scramblings of a half-ass nature.

But improvisation is surely a *practice*, perhaps more in the religious than the musical "woodshedding" direction. A daily attention to what's possible beyond any habituated barriers.

To improvise: to know *in*, and only while undergoing, the process of doing. To perceive only in the motion of an act, in the movements of practicing that act. Improvisation *is* motion. and I think here of the bassist Buell Neidlinger's remark, as we were listening to Ed Blackwell on Ornette Coleman's *Poise*, "He really saw the motions!"
Thus, as in the definition. "not foreseen" because only experienced in the movement and passing along with it.

The French writer Muarice Blanchot has set a fine distinction which might be applied here, whatever the materials: "One can only write if one arrives at the instant towards which one can only move through space opened up by the movement of writing."

Improvisation is the heart of the voice, the seed of the art. The spontaneous aspect of creating whatever kind of own time forms in real time may even be at the heart of supposedly more studied composition or revision. Little shoots of the same momentum, etc.

Though, improvisation sometimes feels like a matter of finding the lit pin in the most dark, or moving vast fragile masses, bales of sound, or ducking (or absorbing) that projectile coming around again.
Or another feeling: the amazing ability to wait while still in motion, as if you are the train that creates all that solid scenery passing . . .

One could work out a speculation on what *is* foreseen in improvisation. A term between *improve* and *impulse* in the dictionary.

The best statement I've seen on the relation of composition to improvisation is soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy's "What I write is to take you to the edge safely so that you can go on out there and find this other stuff. But really it is this other stuff that interests me."

*

Thinking on the matter of spontaneous interaction I'm reminded of an eerie evening in the longago at Carnegie Hall, a hit-or-miss package show Sonny Rollins was to open. Before the crowd had quieted and with the houselights still up, Sonny walked out in front of the curtain, apparently

to play an unaccompanied solo. Just then a woman in the front section began screaming full-throat in shocking snap-brain madness. She was obviously in some closing chamber of mind-pain, and the audience froze. Seemingly without pause for thought Sonny began to play with her, dueting with whatever demons responsible, imitating her screams and turning them around, reflecting and shining them anew. It was astonishing. And there was much of the well-known wit in his sound, but at no remove. He was right in there with this helpless human, which perhaps says a lot about the humours, as well as about music, and Sonny's part in these acts and more. Then the whitecoats dragged her away and Sonny stomped off *Cherokee* at an unbeatable speed, ranging his notes and swinging the bell of his horn from some alien center of stillness.

*

At the entry to *The Crowd*, with those huge horns, I thought I was in Bhutan, comes a sort of undertonic flux possibly the movement of a large truck outside the studio, then calls up some *spaces*, bands of continuous shifting sounds can really define the whole of your room, breaks into pauses suggest further figures, negatives breed positives, keeps heading in with a vast spectral sound, big dark wings or blinds of sonics, where musics become a reality beyond "tune" "beat" etc., then figures divided by solid but silent shapes, equals in time of beautiful collision figures, a group speaking which strongly *tells* you, speaking in reeds, speaking in primes, an eerie rate of tongues, then an almost gamelan sorting of percussive build, reducing to more isolate voices, an intertasting of essential solitudes, until just Ochs' tenor throat, and a final treble linkage, choral, out.

*

This record of Rova works
to dissolve formal barriers
if you can use ears prehensile.
It's an erosion-of-habit music
a chance to encounter forms
beyond your listening history.

*

Rova's music is vast, intense, sometimes complex
but always graspable in terms of their search for the most basic and generative elements, ever lurking in and out.
Hear those tirelessly turning seeds, fist sized, mutating in the zonal exchange of *Terrains*, and throughout *Knife in the Times*.
It's as if the "tonal home" here were always the first thing spoken by a person.

*

I would always want to meet the music as in a dream one encounters the intimate stranger from whom there can never be the slightest turning away. Rapt.

In Rova the conditions are met.

—October 1985
CLARK COOLIDGE

Note: These are liner notes for the new Rova record album, *The Crowd*. (Hat Hut Art #2032), featuring Larry Ochs, Jon Raskin, Brad Ackley & Andrew Voight, with cover art by Robin Winters.

In his review of *The Collected Poems of Paul Blackburn* (*Sulfur* 16), Sven Birkerts seems perplexed about my editorial decision to "dismantle the unities of the original book appearances, and to proceed, instead, strictly in the order of the ascertainable date of composition." Ruminating that we might "consider Blackburn's output as a single long poem," he speculates "possibly this is what Jarolim had in mind when she decided to unravel the separate collections."

What I "had in mind" is no great mystery; it's spelled out quite clearly in my introduction to the book: "The present volume is arranged chronologically by date of composition rather than book by book because there was sufficient overlap within the collections to necessitate either repeating poems or deciding from which collection a poem or several

poems should be eliminated. More important, a presentation based on dates of publication would perpetuate an already distorted view of Blackburn's creative development. He began writing in the middle 1940s, but not until some 20 years later did he have regular access to publication."

Birkerts concedes that I do note in the index the earlier collections in which the poems were printed, but takes issue with the fact that I don't provide any indication of position. I *did* consider including detailed lists of the contents of these collections, but decided against doing so because of space considerations. Since Birkerts complains that the book already "weighs as much as a bag of groceries and has 'definitive' written all over it," I can't imagine why he would have wanted me to have included poems more than once (the index shows just how often some poems appeared in different collections), or to have added even more apparatus to the volume. Why, then the book might have weighed as much as *two* bags of groceries, or at least as much as a bag of groceries and a sack of kitty litter.

EDITH JAROLIM

TODD MOORE: UNDERBELLY OF THE HEARTLAND

With the electronic revolution of recent years, the instant availability of all information, it would often appear that the old, slow rhythms of geographical-cultural evolution are meaningless, have been replaced. I would propose, rather, that they have gone underground.

We have seen, for example, how the westward trek in this country, across the prairies, terminated finally in California; and how this evolved into Hollywood and the California life-style, cultural phenomena lapping back eastward, filling every corner of the nation like an unspent wave.

But I suggest that there is another cultural movement, much slower, behind and beneath all this—a movement that has just left New England, and barely reached the midwest:

Emily Dickinson has finally joined the emigration, uprooted herself from Amherst, and re-surfaced in Belvidere, Illinois, in the person of a high school teacher named Todd Moore.

But Moore is not your ordinary run-of-the-mill high school teacher. According to a note in the back of one of his chapbooks (a volume called *Tough Ass*),

> *todd moore* lives in illinois
> grew up around punks and 2 bit
> mobsters from chicago has a knife

collection in his basement which
extends to the bathroom a disarming
poise and eyes that shoot right thru

Is this a poet one would casually juxtapose with Emily Dickinson? Not casually, no; but quite seriously – yes.

Both are theatrical. They are performers, role-players. The poems are, in the best sense, "staged."

In an essay on Dickinson, I have written as follows: "A Dickinson poem is at its best when the bulk of it is an outward gesture, that then, in the last line or two, runs back upon itself – with an ironic, perverse, failed stab at yankee neatness. In poem after poem she makes a 90° turn – often embedded in a half-rhyme – in the last line or two – so that the poem opens outward – or turns inward – beyond the dimensions of the earlier part." The same could be said, without changing a word, about Moore's poems.

One of Moore's collections, *The Dark and Bloody Ground*, includes a poem called "The Man Who Makes Maps":

. . . a republic of lines
pours from his fingers
each one's a river a creek
a series of low bluffs
hills cliffs or mountains
the taste of grit clay
stones & bark grow rank
in his mouth claim him
while mapping the river
he's absolutely rafting it . . .

Like Emily, Todd distrusts abstractions, can deal only in hard images, hard experiences, tumbling one upon another. He never stops to interpret, to philosophize – leave that to the reader. (Emily had tendencies to philosophize, to become windy – but the yankee pragmatic generally saved her.)

The extremes of sex, violence and perversion in many of Moore's poems would seem most un-Dickinsonian. (She would not read Whitman because she heard he was "disgraceful.") But those were tendencies, perhaps latent, barely hinted, in the maid of Amherst – contained by the surrounding hills, if you wish – now exploded across the flat lands of Illinois.

The Dickinson poems are without titles. Moore's are effectively so, the title, in almost every case, serving as first line of the poem.

The dashes in the Dickinson poems, used incessantly, are like epileptic hesitations. Moore achieves the same effect with an occasional line break in the middle of a word (act / ion").

Finally, the two poets share a sly wit. See the following, by Moore:

Grandmother Cheating

at blackjack high
low jack & game
solitaire she
played a lot to
ward the end stack
ing decks or if
she forgot peeking
under cards & re
arranging every
thing til she won
would celebrate
by humming camp
town races we used
to tell her to
play by rules
she'd grin thin
lips stretched
over bare gums
ask whose

* * *

Moore's poems seem to fall into three general groups, with some overlapping:

Biography (John Dillinger)
History (Pioneers, Frontier)
Current, Deranged Sex and Violence

The Dillinger Poems—and I have only Book One at hand, I understand there are many more—are a collection of short, episodic (epileptic?) Dickinsonian lyrics, that have the effect of accumulating into a biography of the man. There is multiple role-playing here—Moore the actor playing Dillinger the actor playing Dillinger the gunslinger:

getting that meanassed walk
down
&
the feel of the Thompson
tucked under his arm
& the play in the
steering wheels of
stolen cars
getting the pavement feel
of the road
& into the crotch of the girl
beside him

her smile chopping through
grease and ketchup burger
as he plays w/ her hair
& getting the hardassed
over the shoulder
holster look
like in the movies
& the warm glow of
banknotes on his face
when he crams
them into sacks
getting it all
getting it all down just right

Another:

Looking for Dillinger's Windshield

in some Rice Lake
Wisconsin barroom
bartender says
it's been stored
away & what the
fuck it's only a
windshield he
ddn't understand
the poor son of a
bitch didn't under
stand I wasn't
looking for a wind
shield but the re
mains of the lines &
angles from Dillin
ger's face in that
glass & the mirror
shadow of my own

The urge to seek out, reconstruct heroic history through its surviving artifacts – in this case, glass. Glass, that may be both translucent and reflective. The notion that glass may hold the images it has "seen."

In a poem that begins *Dillinger Brings* / his darkness / to the rivers . . ." Moore's recurrent concern with Death is evident . . . a concern that, in Dickinson's case, was almost obsessive.

* * *

How many American writers have come from the midwest? For how many of them is the midwest remembered only as a place to be escaped – as their anxious feet carried them to New York, San Francisco, Paris, Lon-

don? (When one puts together a jigsaw puzzle, the pieces consisting of the contiguous forty-eight states, it is those lumpy middlewestern states that are the last to go in place. For my daughter recently, the last piece was Indiana—Dillinger's home state.) For Todd Moore, on the other hand, the midwest is home—as it was for Dreiser and Anderson, and Meridel LeSueur. And he has stayed home.

The middlewestern "civilization" that Huck Finn was running away from —the small-town pieties and proprieties—have been stripped bare by Moore—and Huck, no less than Emily, would be appalled. What is delineated is the particular kind of perversion, or inversion, that characterizes the midwest, or at least the midwestern underbelly.

not much
room between houses
where we played
grab-ass tag kick
the can & war in a
grit of sour dirt
speckled w/bits
of glass tire shreds
condoms & nails
the night nick
bishop tried to
stuff a dead rat
down sandy frazer's
blouse old man
weber walked out
a third storey
window w/a rope
around his neck . . .

* * *

There is a recurrent fascination with guns.

after a couple
drinks he'd let her
play w/his s & w
44 magnum it looked
big in her hands
what she'd do was
blow cigaret smoke
down the barrel
he loved the way
her lips wd fit
over blue steel . . .

In fact, another way of classifying Moore's subject matter would be Blood, Sex and Guns. And Fire. And History. And a general Looniness.

* * *

Like the midwest of which he writes, Todd Moore's publication record has been schizophrenic. First, a spate of inexpensive pamphlets and chapbooks – some of them mere mimeos. And now, recently, an elegant, relatively expensive, beautifully printed and bound selection of poems entitled *Scales & Weights*.

Aside from the mode of presentation, this volume deserves separate consideration. Following is a publisher's note:

> *Scales & Weights* is a selection of ten poems from a larger body of work entitled "Looking West" a sequence based on the voice, the work, the texts of Laton Alton Huffman – Montana photographer. These poems span the time period 1878-1901.

Although connected with his historical interests, this sequence represents Moore's entry into what is for him (so far as I know) a new genre: that of seeing the world through the eyes of another artist, in this case a photographer.

This is a genre not without its dangers. It is the tendency of the writer, often, to condescend, to squat on the photographer's territory, to intrude, and compete, so that the camera work falls behind the clouds of the writer's ego. Moore absolutely avoids all this. He simply climbs into the camera himself, and peers out.

> let me have a camera
> that walks the
> eye right out of
> my skull & sets
> me in the very
> midst of what
> I see . . .
> . . . . . .
> all at once i
> want to be able
> to climb into
> a wrinkle &
> know the whole
> cracked look
> . . . . . .
> let me have a
> camera that
> bones a pose.

In the earlier poems we have seen Moore as actor, role-player, performing, with almost puritan persistence, within the range of himself, his place, his materials. In *Scales and Weights* he has enlarged that range, but it is not an alien, fabricated image. Rather, he is for the first time speaking metaphorically of his own role as artist, delineating, through the eyes and camera of the early Montana photographer, his relation to his own materials. This is not ego-intrusion, but a humble celebration of brotherhood.

taking portraits
is not an easy
business . . .
Sometimes I feel
my self draining
into a face.

* * *

Todd Moore is a genuine modern *primitive*, in the best sense of the term. Back to basics. At first glance, many of the poems look easy, and easily imitated, almost written from formula. Not so. Reading many of them, and going back to them after a period of time, one comes to recognize a specific, idiosyncratic quality. Moore may be able to write them prolifically, but only Moore can write them. The cumulative effect is hypnotic. Or infective. Or addictive.

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PAUL METCALF

PAUL CHRISTENSEN.
WEIGHTS AND MEASURES: SELECTED POEMS
University Editions (4937 Humphrey Road, Huntington WV 25704). 1985

Christensen's style is traditional. His preferred line is the formal iambic (either pentameter or tetrameter). In those poems which seem less controlled ("The Prince," "A Final Parting," and "Blue Decisions") his master seems to be William Carlos Williams. Indeed, both the form and subject of one of his finest short pieces, "Lunch," seems to echo Williams' famous poems on plums in the refrigerator:

> The joy is simple and perfect;
> to have a single nectarine
>
> cut in four on a plate on a table.
> The afternoon like a wall
>
> thrust up to heaven, shining
> and clear. Nothing
>
> in the soft, scented dark
> but the plate, the fork
>
> the hands at rest silently. (50)

Christensen's penchant for traditional modes is particularly clear in his fondness for the adjectival phrase with a special literary turn: "sudden wilderness," "Her nude moon-luminous body," "the small white focus of her face," "the muffled knock of knuckles," etc. The alliterative tintings, though quiet, contribute to the literary turn, as part of the mode. Christensen works, then, within received stylistic norms. Occasionally, there are echoes of Hardy, Yeats, and Roethke.

The best of the personal poems, and the longest, is "The Nap." Christensen returns to the 1950's when as a boy he sits listening to his mother sleep. The lad drifts fast into a mood that seems rehearsed: "I could feel the walls / turning into flesh," he says. Details suggest the child's view of the world: delivery men and their trucks appear as they do in story books. Inside, a momentary fear wells, as he imagines a burglar's "fox eyes." As he sits waiting, the whole house given over to "napping"("nothing troubled the standstill of time"), the appearance of a neighbor shaking a mop lures him back to reality.

He contemplates "sonship, the filial role." He was the third child, "asthmatic and chinless" at birth. And that birth (during WW II) he notes with humor: He's shot forth from his mother's womb—"a mortar pumped from her own / chute into a swaddle. . . ."

There's always a flow: the mother's breathing rising "silkily" from her lungs, "weaving the darkness around." His own ties to that mother are much subtler than apron strings. The streamers ride through his memory back to infancy and boyhood. He recalls sexual stirrings:

> I knead
> the cold knot in my lap until it stretches
> numbly on my leg, the forbidden
> lump
> knocking upward in its tent of
> corduroy,
> the chicken neck that's always left
> on someone's plate, erect, uneaten
> boney arc standing up now between
> tense legs, as if I charmed a snake.
> No sap—too diluted in my roots;
> I fear it, feel relief as it gives in,
> goes flat, cold nub again. (9)

During four poignant moments of direct address he pleads with his mother to rise up and "kick out these stops to life," not to die, his own fears burgeon, and streamers of time move forward. Via the poem and dream/memory, the mother finally wakens, to that "fallen world we sojourn in." She climbs out of the "coils" of sleep, her eyes half-shut. She puts on tea, dresses, makes up her face to greet the father returning from the factory. The child scrutinizes her, thinking through his own worth as vigil-keeper of her descent.

The theme of the impressive long second section of *Weights and Measures*, "East Africa, 1952: A Dream Sequence," seems to be the Conradian/Rousselian one of a questing spirit traversing rivers, lakes, and jungles in search of visionary experiences; everywhere lies evidence of western civilization in decay, both in the lives of wasted white men, and in abandoned, rusting machinery.

"Lake Nyasa," the longest of these poems, runs to well over 500 lines, and is a fascinating narrative written in supple blank verse, rendered with amazing skill. The story reads like a lurid tale in the Murder-in-Exotic-Lands genre. Maugham might have written a prose version. While I would like to say that the Captain is brother to Conrad's Kurtz, he lacks the latter's obsessions with power and death. Our Captain has premonitions early (viz., in the subtly erotic scenes with his mistress), and shows some fear as he waits for his "double." Conrad's "Secret Sharer"?

In Part III, Christensen returns to some of the motifs of the opening part, mother, childhood, women he has observed and sometimes loved. The violence now seems intensified. In "Whorls" a rape occurs, a playing out of Satanic lust (in fact, in the woman's mind the man slithers away as a snake). Surely Eden has gone wrong; there is no God/swan slacking

his loins. Eve wrenches in the pain of his "grip and bite." "A Final Parting" turns for effect on the opening vision of a superbly detailed view of a woman's "small wrist," observed by a former husband who sees her (and himself, one assumes) aged. Love seems affirmed, however, in "Looking for a Pulse." The images of breasts "stiff as peaches, the / pitted tips" is first-rate Christensen: both passionate and keenly visioned.

Perhaps the most important poem here is "The Far Relations," where observations of his son shimmer evocations of himself as boy. His own son, he writes, "is made of steel: / his veins are wires telephoning to his mother's heart," though the mother is absent and distant, "in the cold / mountains of her own life." With deep affection, Christensen observes the lad take off for school, then return. "His shoes / are large, cumbersome gravestones / of his youth, which he drags half- / heartedly with him." There's so much left unsaid between father and son—a smarting fact conveyed by Christensen off to one side, via an image of toys "stuffed with truths / they have never spoken." (44)

Until I read Christensen's *Selected Poems* I had given up on the possibility that anyone could these days write a poem on family matters worth reading. The genre has been so abused and so sentimentalized. Most of the poetry journals I read, and I read many, would be less than half-filled if they published no poems on families. Christensen is a master of the genre. His artistry both in fashioning lyric techniques of a rare, intelligent order, and his diversion of any potential sentimentality towards unusual and rare images, do set his poems apart.

Further, the brilliant African poems demonstrate, as do his poems which inhabit other psyches than his own, that he is a man with several strings to his lyre. *Weights and Measures* is important, a fact which will go unnoticed in that poetry world of prestigious reviews, prizes, and anthologists. I regret that some major poetry publisher (small press or large) with good distribution facilities did not publish it. The format of the book is dour and does not invite one in; the type-face (is it off a computer?) is not only confusing and small (until you've read for awhile it is hard to distinguish o's from a's) but the lines themselves are too close together for comfortable reading.

Once though I say all this, the fact of this man's achievement remains. I do not agree with him, as he has one of his voices say: "The only mistake you can commit / is to turn back in search of home." His search, though he may not have absolved all the attendant pain, has moved me. For that I am grateful.

ROBERT PETERS

MAUSS'S MEMORY

Marcel Mauss's erudition was legendary. Claude Lévi-Strauss reports that the audience would leave his lectures at the Collège de France or the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes shaking their heads: "Mauss knows everything!" He could uncannily retrieve apt details from a seemingly limitless reading of historical and ethnographic sources in a dozen languages. A passing reference to earrings could trigger a fascinating half-hour, with unexpected asides, on earrings in Polynesia, India, Australia, South America, Africa, Ancient Rome, etc. etc. Lévi-Strauss:

> In his work, and still more in his teaching, unthought-of comparisons flourish. While he is often obscure by the constant use of antitheses, short-cuts and apparent paradoxes which, later on, prove to be the result of a deeper insight, he gratifies his listener, suddenly, with fulgurating intuitions, providing the substance for months of fruitful thinking.

An essay called "Techniques of the Body" gives a hint of Mauss's oral style. Here are a few lines from what is essentially a long list of the things people in different parts of the world do with their bodies:

> It's normal for children to squat. We no longer know how to squat. I consider this to be an absurdity and inferiority of our races, civilizations, societies. [. . .]
> The notion that sleeping is something natural is completely inexact. [. . .]
> Nothing is more dizzying than to see a Kabylie come downstairs with babouches on. How can he stand without losing his slippers? I've tried to watch, to do it, I don't see how. And I don't understand either how women can walk of their high heels. [. . .]
> *Hygiene of natural body functions.* Here I could list numberless facts.[. . .]
> Finally, it must be understood that dancing while embracing is a product of modern European civilization. This should show you that things quite natural for us are historical; they may horrify everyone else in the world except us.

*

Mauss was Emile Durkheim's nephew and chief inheritor of the *Année Sociologique* tradition after 1917. Until 1941, as an influential Paris university professor, he inspired several generations of anthropologists and sociologists. Mauss wrote or contributed to classic studies of magic, social morphology, primitive classification, prayer, sacrifice, reciprocity, and the category of "the person." His ideas also ricocheted in the literary and artistic world. For example, something said at a lecture, "taboos are made to be broken," crystallized Georges Bataille's theory of transgression – at least according to the ethnographer Alfred Métraux who heard the *mot* and passed it on to his friend.

Unlike Durkheim, Mauss was less concerned to defend the specific terrain of sociology than he was to build bridges between diverse perspectives – psychological, sociological, ethnographic, historical – on "l'homme total." The scope of his anthropological vision was summed up best, perhaps, in a famous intervention at the Société de Psychologie in 1924. Discussion had turned to the philosophical problem of identifying fundamental categories of the human mind:

> The Aristotelian categories are not in fact the only ones that exist in our minds, or that have existed in the mind and have to be dealt with. Above all it is essential to draw up the largest possible catalogue of categories; it is essential to start with all those we are able to know men have used. It will then be apparent that there have been and still are quite a few dead, or pale, or obscure moons in the firmament of reason. Small and large, animate and inanimate, right and left have been categories. Among those familiar to us, take as an example that of substance with which I have dealt in a highly technical way: how many vicissitudes has it not undergone? For example, it had among its prototypes, especially in India and Greece, another notion: the notion of food.
>
> All the categories are merely general symbols which, like other symbols, have been acquired by humanity very slowly. We need to describe this labor of construction. Indeed, this is one of the main chapters of sociology understood from the historical point of view. For this labor was itself complex, perilous, chancy. Humanity has constructed its mind by every means: technical and non-technical, mystical and non-mystical; making use of its mind (senses, feelings, reason) making use of its body; taking advantage of chance choices, things and times; taking advantage of nations, their accomplishments, their ruins.
>
> Our general concepts are still unstable and imperfect. I sincerely believe that by concerted efforts, coming from opposite directions, our psychological, sociological and historical sciences will someday be able to attempt a description of this painful history. And I believe that the best philosophy will perhaps be inspired by this science, this awareness of the present relativity of our reason. Allow me to conclude thus.

*

This founding statement of modern anthropology (in Lévi-Strauss's reading) has much in it that could also attract a surrealist, or anyone working to expand the recognized categories of the human spirit. For Mauss, the "mind" is neither a given product of the intellect nor a biological inheritance, but rather a complex historical mix of physiological, emotional, social and political inventions. An emergent anthropology's ability to map and classify this totality is, he thinks, still precarious. And it has no choice but to build its science on the assumption of its own historical and cultural relativity. Unlike Lévi-Strauss, Mauss had no organizing model, drawn from structural linguistics, to order the vast diversity of human symbols

and categories. Indeed, he saw social, mental, or moral orders as tentative, constantly menaced by disorder, produced by historical transformation or ruin. This was particularly evident in his work after the First World War shook his belief in the stability of civilized institutions.

Mauss's best-known work, *The Gift*, builds this awareness of disorder into its survey of one of humankind's basic means for creating social stability: reciprocal exchange. Mauss portrays the fragility of agreements to give and receive. More disturbingly, he stresses the affinities between agonistic giving and violent competition, the thin line separating festival and war. Human sociality – for the Durkheimian, human essence – depends on entering into relations of reciprocity: giving and receiving relatives, commodities, money, visits, words, or any symbolic tokens binding the person to others, groups to other groups. But one cannot be related to everyone; there must be exclusions.

Mauss's survey shows that hospitality or gift-giving often have a dangerous side. They may be violently excessive like the Kwakiutl potlatch. (This was the aspect of Mauss's essay that most interested Bataille and which he would extrapolate in his curious work of "economics," *La part maudite*.) For if *The Gift* most explicitly portrays exchange as a check on violence and potential war, it also shows "normal" social contexts in which giving appears to go haywire, where the agonistic element takes over. Here, the equilibrium model of exchange tips over into the experience of pure spending, ludic or violent excess. Mauss's model of social order does not exclude this ever-present reality. The stakes remain high. His story of reciprocity always contains an "or else" – like the Kwakiutl ritual he cites:

> Part of the ceremonial opens with the "ceremony of the dogs." These are represented by masked men who come out of one house and force their way into another. They commemorate the occasion on which the people of the three other tribes of Kwakiutl proper neglected to invite the clan which ranked highest among them, the Guetela who, having no desire to remain outsiders, entered the dancing house and destroyed everything.

*

The prehistorian André Leroi-Gourhan, remembers his teacher as "a man of inspired confusion . . . [who] managed to concentrate a number of crucial things in very few articles." In an interview Leroi-Gourhan was asked what he recalled of his teacher's speech.

> His silences, if I may put it thus. I can't provide an imitation; so many years have passed, and I have an idealized image of Mauss; but he constructed his sentences in a way that suggested things without declaring them inflexibly. His discourse was all articulations and elasticity. Most

of his sentences came up empty, but it was an emptiness that invited you to build. That's why I said the most characteristic things were his silences.

He was especially amazing when we did textual explications on authors who had worked in Siberia on the Giliaks or Goldies. I remember sessions at Hautes Etudes – there were never more than ten of us, and yet! We gathered around a table like this one, not quite as long; Mauss translated from German to French with commentaries that drew comparisons from every corner of the globe. His erudition was fantastic, and we took it in without really being able to say afterwards how he had managed to be so engrossing.

Mauss did not write books. His *Oeuvres complètes* (edited by Victor Karady) is composed of scholarly articles, essays, interventions at meetings, countless book reviews. Compressed classics like *The Gift*, and *A General Theory of Magic* were published in the *Année Sociologique*. His magnum opus, a dissertation on Prayer remained a collection of drafts, essays, scraps and notes. So did other synthetic works on Money and the Nation. Perhaps because so much was connected in his encyclopedic mind, Mauss could be easily sidetracked. And he was profligate with commitments and loyalties. He lectured constantly and spent years bringing work by deceased colleagues (Durkheim, Robert Hertz, Hubert) to completion. A dreyfusard and socialist in the tradition of Jaurès, he wrote for *L'Humanité*, took part in strikes, elections, and the "popular university" movement. Unlike his rather austere uncle, Mauss was gregarious, bohemian, and something of a *bon vivant*.

Some recall Mauss as a loyal Durkheimian. Others see a precursor of structuralism. Some see primarily an anthropologist, others a historian. Still others, citing his rabbinical roots, training in Sanskrit, and lifelong interest in ritual, ally him with students of religion like his friends Hubert and Leenhardt. Some stress Mauss's bohemian iconoclasm, others his coherent, socialist-humanist vision. Some see a brilliant armchair theorist. Others remember a sharp empirical observer, able to inspire a generation of fieldworkers. The different versions of Mauss are not irreconcilable. But they do not quite add up. People reading and remembeirng him always seem to find something of themselves.

(Leroi-Gourhan) For a period of two years when I was attending nearly all his courses it was agreed that a comrade and I – a Russian Jew, Deborah Lipschitz, who died in the Nazi deportation – would take notes in turn and in a way that would let us compare them to determine the real content of Mauss's teaching. And we never managed to construct anything coherent because it was too rich and always ended up at the horizon. Later, a record of his course was published by a group of former students. Well, there was a total divergence between what they noted

and what Deborah and I took down! This is the secret, I believe, of the real spell he cast on his followers.

*

I have one small story to add to, and no doubt further confuse, Mauss's memory. It started in a conversation with Denise Paulme, the ethnographer from Africa responsible for publishing some of Mauss's lectures under the title *Cours d'ethnographie.* Paulme was reminiscing about her teacher who, even as a Professor at the Collège de France, always retained something of the *bon élève*—brilliant, enthusiastic, chaotic.

We spoke of his tragic end. As is widely-known, Mauss spent the German occupation in isolation and emerged without full possession of his mind. A Jew and a socialist, he was a doubly marked man. Without illusions, when the Germans approached Paris he gave up his teaching and took early retirement as President of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. In public, he wore the Star of David stitched to his coat, with pride. But like many others during those years he stayed out of sight. Close Jewish colleagues—Deborah Lipschitz and Maurice Halbwachs—were deported to their deaths. Mauss saw the reciprocity and collective discipline that had been the underpinning of both his sociology and his socialism crumble. He had once before survived the decimation of a generation. The new assault seemed to break his spirit.

When the Nazis entered Paris, Denise Paulme told me, they set about requisitioning "available" apartments for officers' quarters. Mauss had acquired a rather large flat when he was appointed to the Collège de France. Evicted by the Germans, he moved in with his companion of many years, a woman of working-class origins who lived in a smaller dwelling nearby. But there was no room for Mauss's large library. Paulme and her husband, the ethnomusicologist André Schaeffner (also Mauss's student), were among the friends who helped move his collection of books to the Musée de l'Homme.

The books, she said, were certainly still at the Musée. But she didn't know whether they had been fully integrated into its library. Perhaps not—Mauss's books were an odd accumulation. His rule was not to acquire anything available at the Paris University. (Professors had the run of the library stacks and enjoyed lenient borrowing privileges.) Since Mauss's interests were unpredictable, covering both high and low culture, I was charmed by the idea of his library, a systematic collection of odds and ends. What if it still existed, a dusty heap, uncatalogued somewhere in the Musée's labyrinthine basements?

Yes, I was told when I went to look, of course, the Mauss collection was catalogued long ago. Also, the record of its contents is missing. No

way to tell the things that were kept and those discarded. But would I like to see what remains in storage?

*

Some metal shelves in the dark, covered with dust. Resting on them, a series of wooden drawers of different sizes evidently once belonging to a single large cabinet: Mauss's *fichier de travail,* his working card-file.

The drawers are numbered 1-15, with two missing. They are stuffed with cards, 8 x 12½ centimeters in size. The cards are annotated across the short end (but sometimes the other way) in small, smudged script, often abbreviated and barely legible. Most of the cards merely record a citation. Occasionally a theme is registered. Larger cards, 15 x 9 cm., mark off the categories.

Taking inventory of half a drawer I count 700 smaller and 128 larger cards. Sometimes they are arranged alphabetically, sometimes not. A sampling of categories:

Sociological esthetics (100 cards)
Primitive drawings (80)
Animals (1)
Primitives (3)
Ornament (1)
Distinctive ornament (2)
Tatooing (2)
Jewels (2 – with small pencil drawings, apparently of necklaces)
Plastic arts (3 – Australian art, French popular art, Indonesian art)
Japanese art (1)
Kinds of ornament (8 – mostly Australian references)
Basket ornamentation (2)
Spiral (4 – from diverse locales, mostly illegible)
Figures (2)
Music (1)
Literature (no cards)
Popular literature (4 – one illegible, one on Turkish and Rumanian marionettes, two in German, on folktales of Indonesia and Togo)
Popular songs and rhymes (4)
Legends and stories (200)
Fables (10)
Transmission of fables (1)
Aesop's fables (1)
Parables (1)
Also noted (a partial list): Myths, Meteorology, Weapons, Religion, Collecting, Phenomenology, Definitions, Explanatory theories, Ancient Theories, Truth (3 cards: one illegible, two on Medieval theology), Representations of Nature (1 card: an article by K. Allen, "The Treat-

ment of Nature in the Poetry of the Roman Republic," Bulletin of the Univ. of Wisconsin, 1899) . . .

The drawers are numbered, not labelled. Thus one cannot guess the file's overall topic, if there was one. On a conservative estimate, the thirteen extant trays from Mauss's file contain 18,000 small cards divided by over 7,000 larger cards.

The number of categories is troubling.

*

Mauss lived until 1950, a sad figure. He could become animated . . . but then would lose track and become confused. His extraordinary mind seemed to be turning out of control, starting up lucid, then discouraged, aimless. Little is generally known about his ailment, and most accounts pass over it quickly. Jean Cazeneuve in his short study of Mauss simply mentions "nine years of half-sleep." A terrible nine years. One of Mauss's former students, Pierre-Henri Chombart-de-Lauwe, who saw him in 1946 told me that after a frustrating conversation of fits and starts Mauss's parting admonition was: "Il faut publier!" Make sure you publish! The younger man sensed a scholar with many projects to bring together, an enormous knowledge still to communicate, but lacking the capacity or occasions to do so. A mind fully aware of its own ruin.

Mauss's disarray evidently had medical, moral and sociological causes. I would like merely to add a dimension suggested by the disturbing card file with its 18,000 references and nearly half as many categories.

One of Mauss's most elusive and influential ideas, enunciated in *The Gift* and elsewhere, was that of the "total social fact." According to this doctrine, crucial human institutions – gift exchange for example – should be seen simultaneously as "religious," "political," "economic," and "social" facts; moreover one must not forget their "legal," "cosmological," "aesthetic," "ecological," and "morphological" aspects. To understand such "total" phenomena means to tie them into the whole fabric of human culture, to multiply their connections with other institutions. But there is a limit to the number of interpretive contexts one can bring to bear. And if the outline of the "institution" in question (be it gift exchange, prayer, magic, or the nation) becomes unduly complex then the vision of "total social facts" may dissolve into a frustrating awareness that everything is related to everything else.

Mauss did what comparative sociology does best, with an incomparable, even excessive, flair. He unexpectedly illumined one portion of the world by another; one domain of society by another. Within the focus of an essay, a lecture, or a conversation, he could brilliantly bring to bear his enormous learning, deepening a topic, extending its ramifications. Mauss was an "anthropologist" whose subject was ultimately "man." And

his complementary socialist-humanist vision of unity in diversity embraced virtually all cultures and all epochs.

But there is always another side to such inclusive programs. For wholeness cannot avoid selection and taxonomy—an irreducible arbitrariness. "Mauss knows everything," said his wondering students. But might not knowing so much become a painful disorder when the categories proliferated and the pegs of memory slipped, when the reciprocal contexts in which Mauss's marvelous knowledge could be spoken and heard, taught and learned, were swept away by an abrupt history?

SOURCES

The published work of Mauss is contained in three collections: 1) *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de la France, 1950. This volume, preceded by an important "Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss" by Claude Lévi-Strauss, contains "Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie" (1902), "Essai sur le don" (1923), "Rapports réels et pratiques de la psychologie et de la sociologie" (1924), "Effet physique chez l'individu de l'idée de mort sugérée par la collectivité" (1926), "Une catégorie de l'esprit humain: la notion de personne, celle de 'moi' " (1938), "Les techniques du corps" (1934), "Essai sur les variations saisonnières des sociétés eskimos: étude de morphologie sociale" (1904). 2) *Oeuvres*, in three volumes, edited and introduced by Victor Karady, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1968, 1969, 1969. This collection, containing essays, reports, reviews, oral interventions, etc., is grouped under three thematic titles: *I. Les Fonctions du sacré, II. Représentations collectives et diversité des civilisations, III. Cohésions sociales et divisions de la sociologie.* 3) *Manuel d'ethnographie*, edited by Denise Paulme, Paris: Payot, 1947, a compilation of course notes by Mauss's students.

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See also: Marshall Sahlins, "The Spirit of the Gift," in *Stone Age Economics*, Chicago: Aldine, 1982. Michele Richman, *Reading Georges Bataille: Beyond the Gift*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23(4) 1981.

JAMES CLIFFORD

PARADISE, Ron Silliman
Burning Deck, 1985

Paradise continues Ron Silliman's quest for the perfect sentence. The title, loud and "Hawaiian" though it is, is more likely than not a paradox. It's paradise in the sense of, this is it, folks, this is what you get, take it or leave it, this is the train you boarded or were ticketed for, and you get off only with a leap. It's a paradise in which the final words are "Listen. Be careful out there." We accept that; we can accept that feeling, entirely. It's simply the world that Silliman is writing about, and has been, every chance he's got. Paradise is our lives.

The pattern of development is pleasantly evident in a survey of Silliman's work to date. Just as *Ketjak* (1978) was a step along from *Nox* (1974), with its opening puns of "tree sun," "tuna flesh" and "eggs or size," *Tjanting* (1981) and now *The Alphabet*—of which *Paradise* is an installment—are the fulfillment of what Silliman has called "the New Sentence," the title of his important theoretical essay and one of the cornerstones of recent Language construction. *Ketjak* is progress by increment, language presented in increasingly larger installations—ninety-three pages, written between June 2nd and November 17th, 1974. There, for the first time, the unit of progress, the unit of control, is the sentence, which is increased in geometrical proportion into paragraphic divisions. (Silliman writes in "The New Sentence," "The paragraph organizes the sentences," an instance of the Aristotelian notion of efficient cause.) The subject of *Ketjak* is discrete, but nondescriptive; the subject is the accumulation of novelty.

Most of the sentences recorded in that volume are fairly low-keyed, minimal (as in minimalism), even subliminal. Roughly three thousand sentences in all. Some are more interesting than others, intrinsically interesting: "It was only when the trash bag crashed into the middle of the kitchen that we realized it bore the weight of ants," or "The gentle knocking of a sock filled with sand on my forehead." As opposed to (the entries immediately following): "Meridian mass murder. Odor of old orange in the compost," or "Each term bears its purpose." Some poets would write sentences such as these (at least the first two examples) one to a page; Silliman is not that impoverished. Besides, it's been done before. These are the whimsicalities of perception that Williams strung out down the page:

> It was only when
> the trash bag
>
> crashed into
> the middle of the kitchen

that
we realized

it bore the weight
of ants

Williams, on the other hand, *didn't* write, "so much depends upon a red wheelbarrow" etc., as a sentence. Why he didn't, why there are these differences, is what remains for the observer of recent poetry to explore.

The entire relation between line and sentence must be explored over and over, as Williams did throughout his career, seeking measure, always the measure. Why doesn't Silliman write in lines? There is a sentence, and there is a line, and there is a difference. Traditionally, a sentence is that by which language is condemned to meaning—a cellular block of words to which sense is sentenced. A line has no such burden. Its responsibility is to get ahead. It is usually only an accessory, an instigator, a contributor to a larger "crime" or thrill or necessity. Why hasn't Silliman sought the advantage of lineation, with its concomitants of compression and surprise—an advantage which is almost always rhythmic and assists with the bearing of content forward or across? Actually, he did at one point, in his earliest work such as *Crow* from 1971. But increasingly, he has entered the universe of larger forms, and now it is his discovery of the sentence that distinguishes him.

Paradise, although printed in indented paragraphs, is called a poem by the author (directly on the acknowledgements page); it is not prose or a prose poem in the traditional (French) sense, and Silliman does not use Stephen Fredman's recent term, the not completely felicitous "poet's prose." Nevertheless, *Paradise* is not divided into lines. Rather it is a succession of discrete sentences. Sentences on a hike. Sentences condemned to march. Single-file bhwana-serving sentences, on down the neural pathways. "Simple sentences, again and again," he writes—though that need not be taken as the controlling or exclusive directive.

Clues are to be found in the writings themselves. Despite their apparent automatism (a deceptive automatism), Silliman's writings from *Ketjak* on, remain highly conscious, with hints of methodology throughout: "Rapid transit information," "Epic of doodling," "Burma Shave parataxis," "The beginnings of a new phenomenology of assembling"—any one of which, or all, contain the secrets of his poetics. I have made a list of dozens of them. "The eye is the limit," "Vocabulary of dinner in the syntax of my mouth"—the absurdity of a criticism which seizes only this one or that, like a harried beadle or teacher with a pointer, "Ah rascallion, son of Rasputin, *this* is the one that has been causing all the disruption!"

Silliman's sentences include matters of fact and autobiography: "On my way on a bus in heavy dawn fog to meet Taggart." There is wit, broad and narrow: "Sexism is being less afraid of a big dog if it is being walked

by a woman," or, "A complex form of information called a potato." Some of his sentences subdue themselves; others display metaphoric brilliance: "Farming my face, rakes of razor." *Tjanting* reads like Route 22 in New Jersey, any such road with a variety of roadhouses, building-supply yards, entertainments, some obviously more attractive than others: "Context constitutes . . . Let's start from scratch, she said, meaning scabs. . . . In love, but not in sync . . . Disembodied voices using colord plastic boxes, calld telephones, to negotiate their lives." "183 sentences in 15 days," he writes halfway through the volume, although unlike *Ketjak*, no two sentences are alike. He knows exactly what he is doing, and can laughingly use the language of the world around him: "Becoming identified with an inaccurate but provocative name enabled the Language Poets to rapidly deepen market penetration and increase market share." "Yoyo's alibi, the way back" has all the condensed wit of a poem—or a witticism. (Hear that as title, "Yoyo's Alibi"; and then, as body of the poem, alone on the page in all its wanton ellipticism, "the way back.")

Basically, he has a light heart. There are naked puns—"De moral eyes"—reminiscent of those in *Nox*. The title of *Tjanting* is itself a pun, coming from "a small pen-like instrument used to apply wax designs." (It is not a gerund, grammatically, although it is certainly a gerund in practice.) "In Spain the rain falls mainly on the brain" is Silliman, hat off, open to all possibilities. Puns themselves are inviting, contagious; "Boughs & eros" and "Beaus & errors" lead to one's own participation:

> BOSUN EROS
>
> He had requested long slim shafts.
> There were feather fragments on the parquet, which he tried
> to dust out of sight with his flared bottoms, then to kick
> under the couch with his heel. She sat deeper and pressed
> her knees together in anticipation.
> "Let's play." He reached down behind the couch
> and pulled out a curved stick with a string attached.
> "Bosun eros."

Some single sentences may be worth more than another's entire poem: "The plum tree returned to its skeleton." He is capable of logic, lovely lying logic, and beautiful description: "The shingled roofs tilt upward, notching the low sky." There is full-flavored metaphor—"News is the soup of managed information"—although the total effect is anti-metaphoric, the poem neither a metaphor for thinking or for life. There are theoretical distinctions and heavy implications: "Images are not sentences." And there are allusions: "Dog star boy." How the mind lights up at allusions! Literate ourselves, we always welcome other displays of literacy; we seem rewarded, affirmed: "The enormous comedy of the emotion imposed on the peasant's bent shoulders" (repeated with variations); "Rages. Strain of tartar

sauce"; "general (Halftrack, looking out window, sees Beetle"; "A foot is to trip with"; "The descent beckons within the assent"; "Total Pentax"; "My bookcase, my bottle, my Walkman, my shelf." One of his favorites is "& then went down on the ship," appearing again in various guises in *Tjanting* and *ABC* as well as *Ketjak*.

The sentence, then, as reductive and paradigmatic: "There is no content here, only dailiness . . . ," Silliman writes in *Ketjak*. That he has not confined his choices of what enters the flow, the scan of his attention, to witticisms is an indication that some other principles are operative. There is at least the principle of all-inclusion, pandemic rampancy. Least action, freed signifiers, unselectedness is the principle. But can it be? Can unselectedness be a principle for poetry? Whole generations didn't think so. We are condemned, of course, to think things anew. It may be that by removing associations and couplings, Silliman has produced a more active, effervescent form, rather than monodirectional, commanded writing. (Another view would be that life is too interesting to be left to fragments.) Silliman writes in "generative sentences," to use Fredman's fine term, and his writing returns us to the sources of generation – like all successful poets – to language itself. It sounds like a lazy circle, but there's no way around it. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, and words unto words.

It is also doubtful whether writing such as this is really unselected. Inescapably, some data is more impressive than others. Faces *do* stand out in a crowd, and we go across the room or piazza to them, with every instinct of our body extended, aflame. It is more accurate to say that we are once again, as always, inside limits. A telling revelation is made in *BART* (1982), itself a single sentence, twenty-three pages long, of impressions duly recorded in the order received aride the Bay Area train on Labor Day, 1976: "what I describe is what comes to me in words as I look out the window, *miss all the rest*, can't even write it all." There is no hope to replicate reality. "Words, words / as if all / worlds were there," as Creeley wrote tremulously. Where is "all the rest"? How much gets lost, it is important to know, if we were spies, engineers, colonizers from a distant world.

In the following (from pp. 53-54 of *Paradise*), the poet could have selected just the sentences packing the most wit (I'll italicize my choices): *"Is your bathroom breeding Bolsheviks?* [although that's taken from an old Scott Paper Company "Red Menace" advertisement]. White buttons on black shirt. Stash tea. Sound of a light switch. The middle class is a non-idea. *Parolees form a chorus line. Soft outer flesh of cooked tongue.* ["Tongue" becomes an ambiguity in the present context, and thus delicious.] Accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. *When I allude to sex, I mean you. This race was born extinct.* All Toyota owners frozen at the height of their leaps [reference to a contemporary TV ad soon to be lost to oblivion]. Indirect lighting of back lobby. . . ." Yet he

wants the static, the hum as well as the drum, the full-spectrum challenge of undifferentiated living, what is ultimately the old post-modern act of writing as much as the writing itself. There is no common unifying bond to the sentences, except that they all occurred to Silliman, and we face similar non sequiturs in our own ventures through the layers of consciousness each day.

At this point, we might insist upon the question whether selection is a prerequisite for art. Has Silliman willingly, even willfully, subordinated some glimpses of reality to others? He is not encyclopedic; the impulse seems not to be comprehensive, to possess all the world's experience as his own, to be Representative Man. What, then, is his motive? "Sentences strobe life – continual sequence of data frozen into words." Are any of these statements definitive? Need they be? This is a true question – need sentences be conclusive like Imagism, or seek intellectual or emotional resolution? What we are offered is writing as a continuous process, sentence after sentence, world upon world. Each sentence momentarily exhausts meaning, but life doesn't stop there, so neither does Silliman.

One admires the flexibility, of course, the versatility, even the virtuosity; but the extraordinary thing is how Silliman can contain himself. What severity of will *not* to sustain the associations, not to follow up one perception directly and immediately with another (the old Dahlbergian causality), not to roll with what's given. The temptation to lead the docile reader on must be great, to carefully lay three or more sentences in sequence, to give the reader the illusion of continuity, to give the reader enough rope. Instead, what denial – to choose not to follow up, not to associate, defying Freud and William James. Continuity is suppressed. Morally, it is an implicit universe. Dodging about in the traffic of perceptions, avoiding intention, the writing becomes strategy. There is no intention, for example, to capture the flow of liquified thought and feeling, which is speech. There are only two dashes, no semi-colons, rare italics in *Paradise*. Perhaps Silliman has denied himself the full range of notation available, the full scale. (My sense is he *wants* the rigorous flatness, as a measure to play off his wit.) Many of the sentences in isolation are, under other circumstances or intentions, the first or last lines of a poem (another order of poem): "What if the last person to see me alive isn't born yet?" for example. Why, then, doesn't he write such poems? What thwarts this? Premature gratification, an inability to conceive in wholes, or a different necessity? Leading to yet another leading question: is Silliman – a writer like Silliman – only a mental commando? Does he dare prolong an examination? Is he symptomatic – of a shortened, remote-control attention span? Or the dogged determination to keep up with the simultaneity of existence? I have little doubt he knows what he's doing. Nothing lasts, he seems to say; eternal he seems to say.

Although he eschews connections – "Refuse connectedness," he writes

at an early point in *Tjanting*—he does not abdicate the artist's reponsibility to reveal relationships. Perhaps it is the new Heracliteanism. (In interstellar space, one never passes a face at the window a second time.) Silliman has kept his perceptions spaced-out, in large intervals, a rhythm beyond associationalism. Perhaps it is all a display that randomness is the order of the day, or that tandem-ness is. If his work does not propose itself as an encyclopedia, perhaps it is a time capsule. It is at least an alphabet (says his title), as in the phrase, "an alphabet of needs" or "an alphabet of variations." Ah, now we're getting somewhere; but can the effect be achieved in fewer pages? *Tjanting* itself is 213 pages; *The Alphabet* will probably be as long. When *is* virtuosity achieved? Or the goal, or satisfaction, or the completed poem? For there is also the monotony factor in a work this size (hardly limited to Silliman). Distraction is everywhere at the door. The cornucopia has been tipped. There are untasted foods even in the provincial supermarkets, personal libraries are now as large as ancient granaries or those of an Edwardian London club, there are more cassettes at the corner video store each week.

The competition is on for poets everywhere. It is by courage alone, the great courage of the poets of the eighties, that Silliman follows his vision of what constitutes human need. Silliman's forwarding of the sentence is one of the more interesting contributions to present poetics, one that raises questions about the nature of the art, because it causes us to reexamine the nature of the poetic line. He has allowed himself sufficient room to make the explorations meaningful and unavoidable. We can use his work to discover anew what a line ought to be and to test previously held boundaries of genre, even though it may be that, tested against the sentence, the line will ultimately come back even stronger. Perhaps that, or we will return with results not yet imaginable—which is paradise in another sense.

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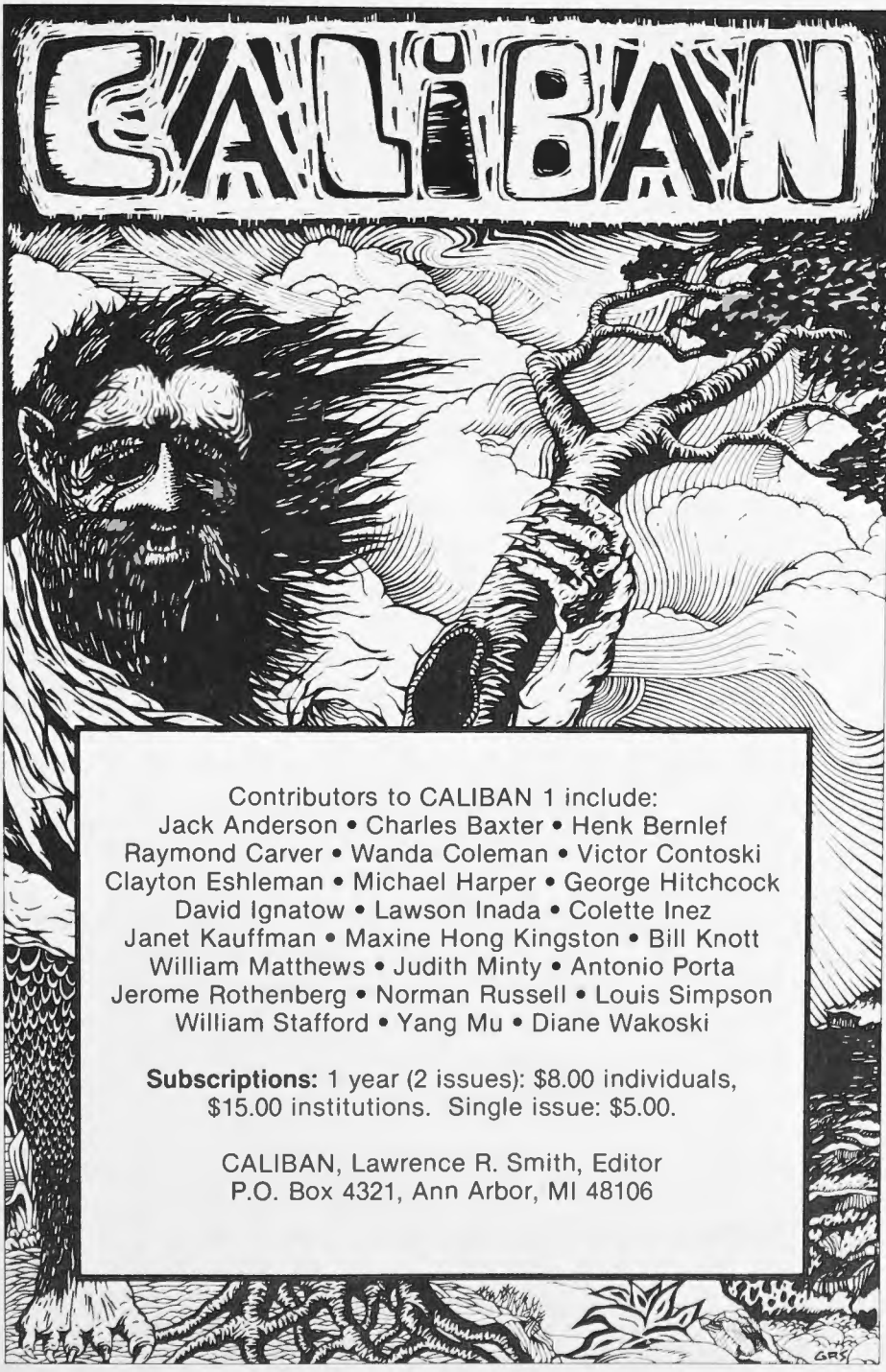

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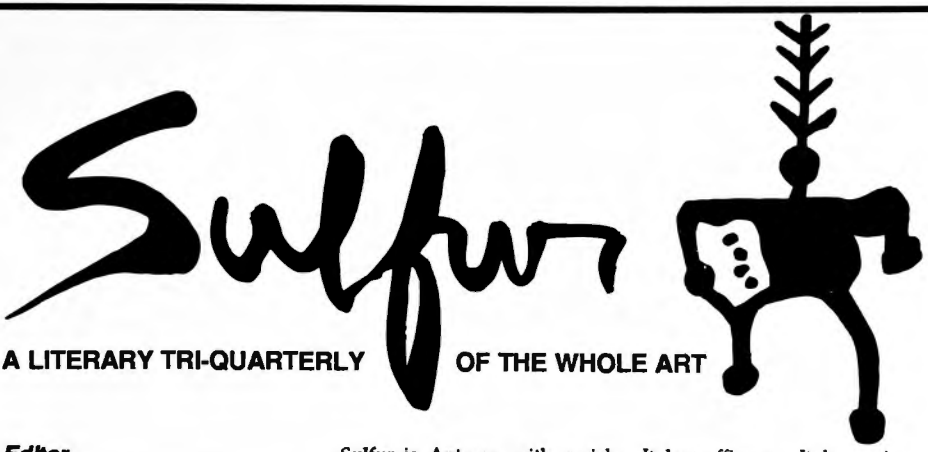

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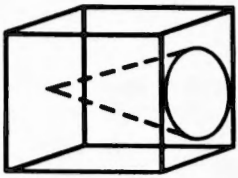

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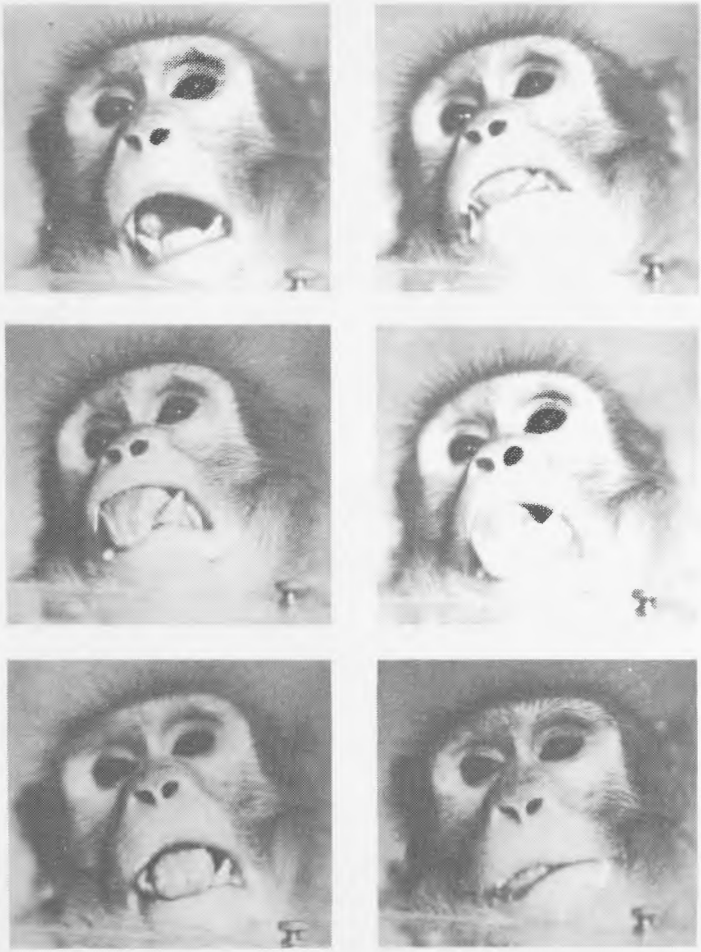

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